Nellie Melba

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MELBA

MELBA : A BIOGRAPHY

BY AGNES G. MURPHY : WITH CHAPTERS BY MADAME MELBA ON THE SELECTION OF MUSIC AS A PROFESSION, & ON THE SCIENCE OF SINGING : ILLUSTRATED BY VARIOUS PORTRAITS, VIEWS, & AUTOGRAPHS

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TO

DAVID MITCHELL

THIS RECORD OF HIS DAUGHTER'S CAREER IS

RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THERE is happily no longer quite the same feeling of hopelessness that there used to be in attempting to place on record the impression made by a singer's voice, for the gramophone and phonograph, with all their inherent defects, can still reproduce so much of the main characteristics of a great performance that some idea can be conveyed of what was the effect produced by the original. There is no need, either, to anticipate, for many a long day yet, the time when Melba's voice shall be no longer heard in its full perfection; but still, it is not without interest for those who may never be able to hear Melba to know in what consisted her wonderful power over her hearers. The parts she has favoured have been mostly the typical examples of conventionalized opera, and it is in respect of her voice, without any external help, that she has attained her great position. To describe the quality of that voice has been attempted in many passages quoted in this book; and it is interesting to compare the various ideas it has called up in various musical minds. Massenet's nickname, "Madame Stradivarius," is perhaps the most apt of all, for it is the violin that most nearly resembles the impression produced by Melba's voice, and the very soul of music lives in

her phrasing. The tone is of a kind that defies analysis in words, for if we call it "sweet," the epithet conveys an idea of lusciousness that is far from true; if the words "clear," "light," or "brilliant" are used, a hint of a sharp, shrill quality is given, which is equally false; and it might probably be best described in a series of negatives. There is never a trace of a tremolo; she is constitutionally quite unable to sing out of tune; and the faultless evenness of her notes never suggests anything in the least mechanical. The absence of any little vocal habit which might be called a trick is yet another of her qualities, and, lest it should be thought that all these propositions might convey an idea of some want of interest, it must be recorded that in the voice itself, quite apart from the question of expressing dramatic feeling by facial expression or gesticulation, there exists an extraordinary power of what is called "colour." Put Melba behind a screen, and the most rapturous exultation of youth, or the most poignant expression of sorrow, will be conveyed to all intelligent hearers, yet without transgressing for an instant the canons of pure vocal art. Of how many opera-singers could the same be said? When her manipulation of this voice is considered, we approach the main secret of her magical charm. Not only is her shake a thing of matchless beauty, with the two notes as clearly audible and as changeless in pitch as if they were played on the piano, but her singing of a scale is a thing quite unique in its perfection. The chromatic scale of an octave up and down which comes into the valse in "Romeo and Juliet" is among the things that are truly unforgettable. From the middle, as it were, of the one note she alights

exactly in the middle of the next, and the pearls to which they are often compared are not only perfectly matched in quality, but are threaded on their silken string with marvellous skill. Some singers have attained such dexterity in disguising the technical difficulty of their feats so completely that their hearer imagines that when he goes home he will be able to perform similar marvels for himself. In spite of Melba's wonderful ease and spontaneity, her performance is felt throughout to be absolutely beyond the attainment of ordinary persons, and in her case astonishment and delight always go hand in hand.

J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND.

LONDON,
May 1909.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND - -	vii
MELBA: A BIOGRAPHY - - - - -	1
LIST OF OPERAS IN WHICH MELBA HAS APPEARED -	312
MELBA'S ADVICE ON THE SELECTION OF MUSIC AS A PROFESSION - - - - - -	313
MELBA ON THE SCIENCE OF SINGING - - -	325
INDEX - - - - - - -	341

ILLUSTRATIONS

	TO FACE PAGE
MADAME MELBA - - - -	*Frontispiece*
MELBA AS A LITTLE GIRL - - - - -	2
DOONSIDE, RICHMOND, MELBOURNE - - -	4
MADAME MATHILDE MARCHESI AND MELBA - -	24
FACSIMILE PAGE BY AMBROISE THOMAS - - -	26
TWO FACSIMILE PAGES BY LÉO DELIBES - - -	31
MELBA AS "LAKMÉ" - - - - -	32
MELBA AS "OPHÉLIE" - - - - -	42
MELBA AS "JULIET" - - - - -	48
MELBA'S BEDROOM, SHOWING MARIE ANTOINETTE BED -	50
FACSIMILE GREETINGS FROM GOUNOD AND GORING THOMAS	56
FACSIMILE PAGE BY RUBINSTEIN - - - -	60
FOUR MEDALS - - - - - -	63
MELBA AS "VIOLETTA" IN "TRAVIATA" - - -	68
FACSIMILE PAGE BY GUETANO BRAGA - - -	69
MELBA AS "ELAINE" - - - - -	70
A SOUVENIR OF FLORENCE - - - - -	76
A SOUVENIR OF MILAN - - - -	78
MELBA AS "ELIZABETH" IN "TANNHÄUSER" - -	90
FACSIMILE MESSAGE FROM JULES MASSENET - -	114
MELBA AS "ROSINA" IN "THE BARBER OF SEVILLE" -	139
AUTOGRAPHS OF JOACHIM, JOHANN KRUSE, EMANUEL WIRTH, AND ROBERT HAUSMANN - - -	140

TO FACE PAGE

AN AUSTRALIAN TRIO: MADAME MELBA, C. HADDON CHAMBERS, AND E. BERTRAM MACKENNAL - - 152

IMPERIAL WARRANT OF APPOINTMENT AS COURT SINGER TO H.I.M. THE EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA - - 159

MELBA AS "MARGUERITE" IN "FAUST" - - - 176

MELBA'S ARRIVAL IN MELBOURNE, 1902 - - - 188

ADDRESS OF WELCOME FROM THE CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC, MELBOURNE - - - - - 198

MELBA'S RETURN TO LILYDALE IN 1902 - - - 200

DEPARTURE OF MELBA FROM DUNEDIN - - - 206

MELBA AS "HÉLÈNE" - - - - - 211

MELBA IN PRIVATE LIFE - - - - - 212

MELBA AS "AÏDA" - - - - - - 214

MELBA AND HER SON, MR. GEORGE ARMSTRONG - - 247

MR. DAVID MITCHELL, MELBA'S FATHER - - - 280

"MY SONG-BIRD HAS FLOWN AGAIN" - - - 290

A FAVOURITE PROFILE PICTURE OF MELBA - - 304

MELBA

CHAPTER I

Melba's father and mother were both of Scottish birth and descent, and came from Forfarshire: David Mitchell, simple and strong, upright and resolute; and his wife, Isabella Ann Dow, gentle and sensitive, but full of courage and cheerful philosophy. Given favourable conditions, they would both have been persons of account in any community. Mr. Mitchell has in turn directed his energies to building, contracting, squatting, and wine-growing, and in all he has reaped a liberal harvest of success.

On two of his properties he recently discovered a soil suitable for the manufacture of a particular kind of cement, with which he claims that entirely fireproof buildings, including staircases and ceilings, can be constructed speedily and cheaply without the temporary iron mould by which Edison aims at popularizing cement-made houses. It is significant that his eighty years present no barrier to his cheery embarkation on this new enterprise.

Both parents were sincerely fond of music; the mother, a woman of artistic temperament and more than average culture, being an amateur of considerable accomplishment. She also used her brush effectively

in the creation of pictures both on canvas and china, and played the piano, harp, and organ uncommonly well. Mr. Mitchell, too, had musical talent, but not in so full a degree as his wife, although he made good use of a bass voice of beautiful timbre, and played the violin with some skill. Two of Mrs. Mitchell's sisters possessed voices of rare beauty and a measure of musical knowledge wholly exceptional in amateurs. They were regular visitors at Doonside, Richmond, Melbourne, where Helen Porter Mitchell—the Melba of to-day—was born, the third child of her parents. From her infancy she was thus constantly accustomed to hear music, and her earliest recollection is of crawling under the grand-piano when about four years of age to listen in wonder and delight to her mother's playing. In this retirement she would rest perfectly content, so long as her mother remained at the pianoforte.

The father took the greatest pleasure in encouraging his little daughter's love of music, and she has often since told how, "when I was quite a baby, it was my great joy to sit on my father's knee on Sunday afternoons when he used to amuse himself at the harmonium. He would blow the bellows and sing a bass accompaniment to the hymn which I picked out on the keyboard with one finger."

When six years of age, she appeared at a school concert organized by her aunts in Richmond, Melbourne. At this entertainment she sang "Shells of Ocean" with such effect that the audience asked for an encore, and the child, on her reappearance, created a still better impression by her singing of "Comin' thro' the Rye," in which her grandmother had taught her the Scottish accent. The ap-

MELBA AS A LITTLE GIRL

plause of that delighted company was her first taste of public enthusiasm, and her joy was without bounds. On returning home it was with difficulty she could be induced to sleep, and next morning she was up with the lark in order to talk over the wonderful concert.

At the earliest opportunity she hurried to her favourite playmate, who lived in the same street, and breathlessly waited for some reference to the entertainment of the evening before; but the little comrade was adamant and ignored the whole subject. After many indirect attempts to introduce it, Nellie at length found herself unable to wait longer, and exclaimed excitedly: "But the concert, the concert! I sang last night, and was encored"; and she looked with eagerness in the face of her friend, who answered witheringly: "Yes; and, Nellie Mitchell, I saw your garter." Miss Mitchell had been particularly pleased with her neat attire, and this unexpected shaft, coming in place of the looked-for compliment, in an instant blotted out the memory of the intoxicating encore, and drew the little singer from the seventh heaven of her brief delight to the limbo of unkind disillusion.

Another story tells how, at the age of eight or nine, she crept downstairs one night long after all the family had retired to rest, and, taking her place at the piano, began Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." Before she had proceeded very far, the whole house was aroused by the unusual disturbance; but when her father came to the door and gazed on the little white-robed figure, looking for once the very picture of docility, he had not the heart to chide her, but smiled indulgently as he carried her back to bed. At this time she remembers that her favourite songs

were "Comin' thro' the Rye" and "Nellie Bly," the latter winning her favour because the heroine was a namesake.

The playthings of the average little girl had no attraction for Nellie. Dolls were entirely outside her interest; but for a wooden rocking-horse equipped with tail and mane of orthodox hair she developed quite an inordinate affection, and for several years regarded the donor, Mr. Newbiggin, who had long been confidential manager to her father, as a being more wonderful than any Santa Claus.

The little girl's early education was directed by two aunts, sisters of Mrs. Mitchell, and their old pupil is never tired of recalling instances of their competence and their patient kindness to her. "My Aunt Lizzie," she writes, "possessed a soprano voice of extraordinary beauty. I can clearly remember the perfect control with which she used it, and the facility of her execution, even in the highest pianissimo passages. I feel sure she would have made a brilliant success had she become a public singer."

Love of mischief led Nellie Mitchell into all sorts of misdemeanours, and as a measure of repression she was sent as a boarder to Leigh House—a school in Bridge Road, Richmond, standing on high ground—from the upstairs windows of which she could see the tower of Doonside. This possibility intensified her grief over the new order of things, and for hours at a time she would stand at the window screaming piteously to be taken home. When Mr. Mitchell heard of this, he made a point of passing Leigh House whenever he went in or out of the city, so that she might be consoled by seeing him. But the sight of

DOONSIDE, RICHMOND, MELBOURNE

WHERE MELBA WAS BORN AND WHERE HER FATHER STILL LIVES

her father only made matters worse, and when she espied him in a buggy or on top of a bus she cried so much more that the boarding-school was set down as a failure, and she was taken home.

When old enough, Nellie was sent to the Presbyterian Ladies' College in East Melbourne, a scholastic establishment of the very highest standing, where she took fair advantage of the admirable opportunities offered, without ever becoming in any sense a brilliant pupil, except in the department of music, where she was consistently and conspicuously successful. Wilful, daring, uncomprisingly frank, and possessed of inexhaustible energy and irrepressible spirits, she was constantly in trouble—the ringleader in every turmoil, and the unabashed confessor of her foibles. Together with the ordinary subjects of a girl's education she took up singing, and received a certain number of lessons from Madame Christian, a well-known professional singer, who has since become a nun, and now successfully directs the music-school at St. Vincent's Convent, Sydney; but these were not a matter of serious attention then, and her best and fullest thought was given to the pianoforte and organ, which at a very early age she could play extremely well.

In early girlhood she became an expert in the art of whistling, an accomplishment which in later years she often put to practical use when studying operatic rôles; and as this attainment was supposed to be peculiarly shocking to the sentiments of the Presbyterian college teachers, it was in a corresponding degree particularly admired by the pupils, who were never tired of hearing her whistle the popular airs of the day. By way of variety, her young comrades

would often cluster round her, and say: "And now, Nellie, make that funny noise in your throat"—this being the earliest appreciation of the natural trill which was subsequently to serve her so admirably in her professional career. The opinion has been hazarded that her juvenile feats as a whistler may have helped in the development of the unrivalled breath-control for which she is now famous.

The whole of her school-days were spent in the city of Melbourne, but her holidays were divided between the different country places belonging to her father. She was particularly well known at Lilydale, a pretty township which, owing to its close proximity to Melbourne—from which it is only distant about twenty-four miles—was a regular visiting-place of the family. Here Nellie Mitchell rode, drove, fished, and romped generally, with an amount of hilarious zest that bewildered the staid and delighted the joyous of the neighbourhood. No prank was too wild, no mischief too disconcerting, for her. Returning from an extended holiday in South Gippsland on one occasion, she was so delighted at getting back to the city, that on the final stage of the journey—a coach-drive from Hastings to Melbourne—she allowed neither man, woman, nor child to pass without calling out some joyous and mirth-provoking greeting.

"An incident of my childhood that has often been told against me," said Melba not long ago, "relates to one of my visits to a country place of my father's when I was about twelve years of age. I was furious when I found there was no piano in the house, and refused to be comforted when my mother drew my attention to a dislocated harmonium and a con-

certina, which it was hoped might satisfy me. In teaching myself the concertina I eventually wiled away many an hour, but when that was finished I was again most dissatisfied because there wasn't a piano. In these outlying Bush districts it was then the custom—and, indeed, is to-day—for a clergyman or lay-preacher to come along on Sundays, and at the principal homesteads hold service for the family, the servants, and the station hands, who at shearing-time often make quite a large congregation.

"On one of these occasions we were visited by a worthy man who preached a very long and, as we children thought, a very dull sermon. When he finished he suggested that we should sing a hymn, and my mother asked me to play it on the harmonium; but I was so wearied by the discourse, and so full of my grievance in regard to the piano, that my feelings got the better of me, and instead of the hymn I played with great vigour 'You should see me dance the Polka,' to the consternation, even horror, of my father and mother, who sent me to bed for the remainder of the day."

Bubbling over with health and spirits, Nellie Mitchell's childhood was one continuous term of joyous revolt against any kind of restraint, and in consigning her to a day's confinement within the narrow walls of her bedroom her parents had selected the most telling of all reasonable punishments. She hated to be still herself, and she hated to see other people still, particularly if they, as a consequence, exacted quietude from her. Her father and his brothers were fond of playing whist, and often sat for hours at the game, their keenness in the contest making them anxious for the utmost quiet in the room where they

played. During one of these long-drawn-out séances Nellie's patience became quite exhausted. Procuring a pair of bellows, she silently stole under the table, and, placing her weapon of attack in position, blew a mighty blast up the leg of her uncle's trousers—a proceeding which speedily demoralized the whist-party.

"When I was about twelve or thirteen years of age," says Melba, "I had what then seemed to me a real adventure. I was making good progress with my music, and received permission to practise occasionally on the grand organ of the Scots Church, where my people worshipped, and where my father now and then sang in the choir. Late one afternoon I stopped playing, and sat at the keyboard thinking. I remained there for some considerable time, and when at last I made my way to the door, I found I was locked in. The verger, believing that I had gone, had bolted and barred the doors. In a moment I worked myself into a perfect agony of mind. The church was already dark, and the pulpit and organ, in their grey dust-sheets, looked like some dreadful spectres. A night alone in such a place, I thought, would drive me mad. The frenzy was already asserting itself, when I heard a key in the door. The verger had returned for something he had forgotten, and I was released from my terrifying solitude."

On another occasion—a blazing midsummer day it was, when the pleasures of sea-bathing seemed particularly alluring—Nellie and a little girl friend set out for the old Stubbs Baths, which at that time were approached on one side across a miry swamp bridged by a long narrow plank. The great probability of mishap for anyone who did not step with

care had no deterrent effect on Nellie, who at once began to run up and down the narrow swaying board at an alarming speed. The inevitable happened, and she overbalanced herself into the quagmire beneath, from which she afterwards emerged entirely covered with mud. In all her frolics she kept a close eye on the neatness of her person, and the unwelcome coat of mire filled her with impatience for its removal. Hurrying to the baths, she secured her ticket, and instantly plunged into the sea, without removing her clothes. Paddling about until the mud was washed from her garments, she then changed into the regulation bathing-dress, and played in the water until the sun had dried her ordinary attire, in which, through her resourcefulness, she was finally able to make a fairly presentable appearance on the return trip home.

It is only to be expected that old Melbourne playmates and friends should delight to recall memories of the many wild frolics into which Nellie Mitchell so gaily entered in these early days, and it is told of her that on one occasion, during the temporary absence of the driver, she nimbly mounted the front seat of an omnibus, and drove the public conveyance down one of the principal streets of the city at a pace that sent the frightened pedestrians scurrying in all directions.

Early evidence of a leaning towards dramatic personation is given in a practical joke planned at the expense of her father. The nuns belonging to one of the Melbourne convents were engaged in a work of charity which necessitated a house-to-house canvass for subscriptions. Nellie knew of this, and at a suitable opportunity improvised the dress of a

religieuse, and, with the assistance of the servants, got to the front door without being seen by any members of the family. She then rang, stated her mission, and begged an audience of Mr. Mitchell, who presented himself with some reluctance. With downcast eyes and gentle voice she pleaded the cause of the convent charity with such success that her father, who did not see quite clearly why he, a Presbyterian, should support a Catholic institution, at length gave her a sovereign. When he found out the trick played on him by his daughter, he was easily persuaded to let her retain the donation for herself.

Her early years were passed under the happiest conditions. Given good health, an attractive home, numerous holidays, full means for their complete enjoyment, and the tenderest parental care, she flourished in body and mind, and, despite—or perhaps because of—her hilarious escapades, became the darling of the family, whose devotion she amply returned in her own frank, unpretentious manner. For the adequate encouragement of her musical progress an organ was built into the drawing-room at Doonside, and she was given frequent opportunity to hear whatever notable musicians visited Australia. Her criticism of the artists was often of so severe a character that her mother, as a wise measure of repression, occasionally left Nellie at home when taking the other children to these concerts. All the other members of the family invariably expressed the keenest delight over the performances, but her approval was not so easily won, and where she thought there was reason for adverse criticism she gave it unreservedly, to the especial discomfort of her mother, who feared that the precocious judgment

of the child indicated a want of musical sympathy and appreciation. Madame Arabella Goddard was the first artist to leave an impression of unusual gifts on the mind of the young critic.

It was at this period that she conceived the idea of herself performing at a real concert in the drawing-room at Doonside, and she carried through all the preliminaries with perfect completeness. Her father, seeing in this entertainment a possible step towards the professional life which had already been suggested for his daughter, and which he both feared and opposed, sent round to all the family friends and begged them not to attend. His canvass among her prospective audience was very successful, for only two people presented themselves on the day fixed for the concert. She, however, neither stormed, nor wept, nor made a fuss of any kind. She just took her music and went through the arranged programme as formally, as cheerfully, and as carefully, as though her audience of two had been an overflowing house at London or Paris on a gala night.

On another occasion, while still in the amateur status, she organized a concert at Sorrento, Victoria, where she was holiday-making with her family; the object being to provide a new fence for the local cemetery, the dilapidated appearance of which had appealed to her kind heart through her order-loving eye. She had used up all available funds on the expenses of preparation, and, when the bill-posting came to be done, had no money in hand to pay for that item. Unwilling to sacrifice valuable time and burden the concert with any unavoidable expenses, she at once resolved on a novel means of escape from the dilemma, and, armed with a brush and a pot of

paste, she went out after sunset and did the bill-posting herself, making a particularly good show on the cemetery fence that was to be repaired by her efforts. At the concert she sang "The Angel at the Window" (Tours) and "Sing, Sweet Bird" (Ganz), receiving much applause from the audience, which completely filled the Mechanics' Institute. The newspaper accounts described the concert as quite above the ordinary amateur standard, and upwards of £20 was realized for the cemetery funds as the outcome of her good management.

It was in 1881, before Nellie's voice had ever been formally heard in public, that the death of her mother brought her the first experience of a real sorrow. So very deep was the impression created by this bereavement that she can even now recall with poignant realism every detail of that scene of sadness. The affection existing between mother and daughter was one of unusual tenderness, and on the first copy of a photograph of herself, taken in Paris at the time of her début, she wrote an inscription to the unforgotten dead: "To my dear mother and best friend."

CHAPTER II

On December 22, 1882, at Brisbane, Queensland, took place the marriage of Charles Nesbitt Frederick Armstrong, youngest son of the late Sir Andrew Armstrong, Bart., of Gallen Priory, King's County, Ireland, to Helen Porter Mitchell, eldest daughter of David Mitchell, of Doonside, Richmond, Melbourne.

Mr. Mitchell had welcomed the marriage of his daughter as the sure termination of her aspirations after a professional life, and in paying Signor Cecchi and her other teachers for the tuition received up to that date he felt a certain parental satisfaction that there would be no more disturbing music-lessons. She spent the whole of 1883 in Queensland, where her husband was interested in sugar-growing. During this term the future prima donna had a narrow escape from drowning. Mr. Armstrong took his wife and a guest out in a small sailing-boat at Port Mackay, and on crossing the bar they were soon in difficulties. A squall struck the little craft, which was overturned, and the three occupants were immersed in the deep waters of the Pacific. They succeeded in holding on to the upturned boat until assistance arrived from the pilot-station, where the look-out man had fortunately witnessed the accident. The heat and the monotony of life in North Queensland

were not at all to the liking of Mrs. Armstrong, who almost regarded the yacht capsize as a welcome break in the dull routine of life.

Miss Mitchell's marriage made a very considerable break in her musical studies, but at every possible opportunity she endeavoured to improve herself as a performer on the organ and piano. Her principal teachers on these instruments were Mr. Julius Buddee, Mr. Guenett, and Madame Charbonnet Kellermann—the last a clever Frenchwoman, whose daughter, Miss Annette Kellermann, has been much in the public eye of late years as the champion woman swimmer of the world. From early girlhood Mrs. Armstrong played the organ on many occasions at the Scots Church, Collins Street, and as a contributor of piano and organ solos she soon came to be in wide request for amateur musical functions. Her success as a musical amateur, and other circumstances, led to a wide popularity, which eventually came to be a considerable tax on her available financial resources, and this condition provided an extra and welcome excuse for her adoption of the professional life, to which she had always felt herself drawn. She had taken singing-lessons at intermittent periods from Signor Pietro Cecchi, a retired Italian singer, and as a result she now and again sang at some small private parties, where, however, her piano solos were always the main attraction. Over and over again it was freely stated that if she became a professional pianist she would be sure to make a pronounced success. At one of these private musical soirées given at Government House, Melbourne, Mrs. Armstrong supplemented her pianoforte solos by a vocal selection. At the conclusion of the latter, the late Marchioness

of Normanby, wife of the then Governor of Victoria, said: "Child, you play brilliantly, but you sing better. Some day you will give up the piano for singing, and then you will become famous." This was at a time when everyone had been thinking of Mrs. Armstrong as a possible pianist, and so it was that Lady Normanby was the first person to suggest the career of a singer for the young amateur. This lady's prediction shifted the whole channel of Mrs. Armstrong's thoughts, and on Saturday, May 17, 1884, as a pupil of Signor Cecchi, she made her first public appearance as a singer at a complimentary concert for the benefit of Herr Elsassar, a local musician who had been overtaken by misfortune. Thenceforward her reputation in Australia as a vocalist began to grow, and during the latter part of that year and throughout 1885 she regularly sang at concerts. The first regular engagement she received was from Mr. George Musgrove, of Williamson, Garner, and Musgrove, the well-known Anglo-Australian impresarios, who gave her £20 a week during a concert season. Allowing for four concerts a week, this sum would work out at about £5 for each concert—terms which Mrs. Armstrong considered quite satisfactory. Seventeen years later, when she had become the most famous prima donna of the day, Mr. Musgrove was once more the impresario of her Australian concert tour, during which the receipts on one occasion at Sydney reached such a figure that her net share of the proceeds was £2,350—the largest sum ever paid to any singer in any part of the world for a single evening's vocalization.

The most important engagement she fulfilled in 1885 was for the initial tour just mentioned, with

the Kruse concert party, which was headed by a very clever compatriot, Mr. Johann Kruse, who had already won liberal fame in Europe as a violinist, and at whose home in Richmond, Melbourne, Miss Mitchell had already found many opportunities of revelling in that musical atmosphere which she so sincerely loved. The Australian public, as a whole, did not regard Mrs. Armstrong as a vocal marvel, but the newspaper critics, in the most whole-hearted manner, proclaimed her remarkable gifts, and she worked on with untiring energy towards the perfection of her musical heritage. But because of the easy circumstances of her family, her early marriage to a man of good prospects, or some non-evident cause, the Australian public never allowed her to separate herself entirely from the ranks of the amateur; and when, after eighteen months' experience, she decided to try her fortune in Europe, it could not be reasonably claimed that the people of her own country recognized in her the possibilities of future greatness. In December 1885, she sang in Sydney, New South Wales, with the Sydney Liedertafel and the Sydney Philharmonic Society, and on each occasion, especially for her share in the latter's production of the "Messiah" under the conductorship of Monsieur Henri Kowalski, she received the warm commendation of the critics. A month later Mrs. Armstrong gave a farewell concert on January 22 at the Masonic Hall, Sydney, when the Hon. Daniel O'Connor, on behalf of her friends, presented her with a handsome gold badge, which Lady Carrington affixed on her breast. Lord Carrington was at that time Governor of New South Wales, and he and Lady Carrington on that evening

began the friendship which has been kept up ever since.

Towards the close of 1885 Mrs. Armstrong was engaged as principal soprano in the choir of St. Francis's Roman Catholic Church in Melbourne, then and now noted for its splendid musical service. She regarded this recognition of her musical progress as very encouraging. Perhaps it is because of it that, although she still belongs to the denomination of her forefathers, she cherishes a lingering interest in all things appertaining to the Roman Catholic Church, the picturesque ritual and romantic traditions of which would in any case appeal to her artistic sense. On severing her connection with this choir as a preliminary to her departure for England in March 1886, the members presented her with an illuminated valedictory address, couched in terms of extreme eulogy and good-will. She had only been with them for four months, and the kindly feeling which they showed, in spite of the brevity of the association and the difference of faith, may be cited as an early instance of that power of winning strong regard which has since become one of the happiest features of her personality. During Mrs. Armstrong's brief Australian career as a singer, she appeared in different cities of the Eastern States with varying financial success. Several engagements of considerable local importance fell to her lot, but in a bid for the sustained support of the public, through the medium of a concert tour given during January 1886, she was rewarded by such scanty patronage that in some cases the receipts did not cover the rent of the hall.

Now, as has already been mentioned, when back again in Melbourne, more than a year after her

marriage, Mrs. Armstrong had, on the pressing invitation of Signor Cecchi, resumed her singing-lessons with him at such irregular intervals as her circumstances would allow. These lessons had been continued during 1885, but with greater irregularity, owing to her frequent absences from Melbourne at the concert engagements she fulfilled in that year at Sydney, Ballarat, Bendigo, Hamilton, and other places. In Melbourne, too, her concert appearances were many, if not very lucrative. Under these circumstances Signor Cecchi had said that he would make no charge for these intermittent lessons, but that, if she ever made the success which he believed she would make, she could then pay him—an arrangement not unusual in the musical profession. How liberal that payment would have been those who know the singer can easily understand.

All this time her heart was set on seeking fame in Europe—an ambition which Signor Cecchi consistently encouraged. Towards securing funds for the purpose of travel and study, she gave concerts in New South Wales and Victoria, which, as already stated, ended in financial failure. Thus, at the beginning of 1886 she was still, apparently, far from the realization of her dream. Her father had by this time become convinced that her craving for an active life in music must be seriously reckoned with, and when he was appointed Victorian Commissioner to the Indian and Colonial Exhibition held in London that year, he invited Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong to accompany him, and agreed to pay for a year's lessons under whatever teacher she selected. The farewell concert in Sydney had left a small financial balance to her credit, and that held in Melbourne realized the modest

sum of £65. Supplementary to her father's assistance, this money would help to pay for clothes and the other expenses necessarily incidental to her ambitious undertaking.

When everything was settled, and when the prospect of a fair start seemed favourable, Signor Cecchi, acting on foolish advice, or for some other reason, applied for immediate payment at full rates for the lessons he had given her during the preceding twenty months. At first the young singer was so astounded that she regarded the demand as a joke; but her momentary doubt was soon and sadly dispelled. Once again it seemed that the great desire of her life was to be thwarted, and this time by the teacher she had always gratefully esteemed as a friend. Fearful lest the knowledge of Signor Cecchi's action should reach her family, and revive their scarcely dormant opposition to her professional aspirations, she was reduced to a state of great mental embarrassment, and designed one expedient after another, until she finally found a friend willing to lend her the money for the satisfaction of her teacher's account. When she got the loan, she paid to the last penny the full amount of Signor Cecchi's claim, which may have been made in a moment of chagrin or misunderstanding, but which, nevertheless, filled her with sorrow and disappointment. Then she drove the circumstance from her memory—or at least appeared to do so; for the name of Signor Cecchi never again escaped her lips, and if she has been resolutely silent as to his share in her early vocal training, her lips have also been as resolute in the still more characteristic silence that refused to link his name with one word of blame.

The Governor of Victoria and Lady Loch were the principals in the audience at the Melbourne Town Hall on Saturday, March 6—the occasion of Mrs. Armstrong's farewell concert in her native colony (now State). Here again the critics were unanimous in their praise, and if during the two preceding years the public had not given the young singer the support she deserved, it was not through want of intelligent direction on the part of the authorities to whom musical amateurs usually look for guidance. In the years that followed, the Australian people were so fearful lest they should allow another "Melba" to go forth to the great world of Europe without proper recognition, that every local vocal aspirant who announced her intention of seeking European fame was rewarded with exceptional evidence of public interest and generosity. On March 11, 1886, Mrs. Armstrong, accompanied by her husband and baby and her father, sailed for England preparatory to entering on her task as a student of grand opera, in which domain of music she had now definitely decided to endeavour to make a name. This decision on the part of one who had never heard grand opera, in whose environment there was not a single fostering element towards that goal, and whose young life was already largely filled by her husband and little son, was in itself striking evidence of the independence of her character, and of that mysterious call which guides the destinies of the singer who is born, not made.

CHAPTER III

On May 4, 1886, a few days after her first arrival in England, at the opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London, Madame Albani sang "Home, Sweet Home," and at its conclusion Mrs. Armstrong, who had listened throughout with rapt attention, remarked, with a gratified sigh: "That's worth coming from Melbourne to hear." This initial element of greatness—the ability to appreciate greatness in others—was early manifest in Melba, who in the succeeding years has given constant evidence of the most whole-hearted *camaraderie.*

The indefinable inner persuasion as to future success in a musical career which Mrs. Armstrong had felt in a vague way since her earliest childhood, and the confidence in this future which later years definitely developed, were not destined to receive any impetus during the period immediately following her first arrival in England. She sought a hearing wherever possible, from persons of established positions in the world of music, and the opinion they expressed was not calculated to cheer the young Australian in her self-imposed task of winning operatic fame. As ill-luck would have it, Sir Hubert Parry had been forced to make a rule against hearing in private the applicants for musical distinction who were just then arriving in shoals, and so could not even grant her a hearing for which she had asked.

The late Sir Arthur Sullivan did not consider her vocal attainments sufficiently good to justify his suggesting her inclusion in the Savoy Opera Company, although he did add that, if she worked hard, he might be able to get her an engagement in "The Mikado" after a year's further study. The prospect of entering the musical profession through the medium of light opera, however, had no real attraction for her. After an interview with Signor Alberto Randegger, Mrs. Armstrong received the disheartening intimation that he did not feel warranted in accepting her as a pupil. In after years Sir Arthur and Signor Randegger were numbered among her warmest friends and admirers, and on many an occasion of triumph for her she used to tease them both for their early want of confidence in her powers —a want of confidence probably justified by some temporary circumstance. The result of these setbacks on the young and ambitious Australian, just arrived in a country of the conditions of which she knew little or nothing, reduced her to considerable depression, yet in no way interfered with her determination to fight for success. The first glimpse of encouragement she received in London was from Mr. Wilhelm Ganz, who pronounced a favourable opinion on her voice, and gave her an opportunity to sing at Emil Bach's concert in Prince's Hall on June 1, 1886, and also at the dinner of the Royal General Theatrical Fund in the Freemasons' Hall. She had brought a letter of introduction from Mr. A. Cellier to Mr. Ganz, who further made an appointment for her with Mr. Carl Rosa; but the note of appointment which the manager had pencilled on his cuff as a reminder escaped his attention, and when she called

at Mr. Ganz's house in Harley Street, where the meeting was to take place, he was not there. She waited long and patiently, but he never came, and, although most anxious for an opening, it is characteristic of her that she could not be induced to make a second appointment with the momentarily careless manager.

Mrs. Armstrong soon realized the advisability of entering on a term of study abroad, and she went to Paris and presented herself to Madame Mathilde Marchesi, to whom she bore a letter of introduction from Madame Elise Wiedermann Pinschoff, wife of the Austro-Hungarian Consul at Melbourne, herself a singer and teacher of considerable reputation. Madame Marchesi's reception of her visitor was very cordial, and after the young aspirant had sung her first song, the veteran teacher turned away, and, without speaking, hurried to the door of the apartment. Mrs. Armstrong, already severely disappointed by expert opinion in London, was in a state of acute eagerness for Madame Marchesi's pronouncement, and when the old lady moved as if to leave the room, the few intervening moments seemed like so many hours. On reaching the door, Madame Marchesi, without any preliminary, called to her husband: "Salvatore, Salvatore! at last I have found a star." The relief which this announcement gave to the waiting student was unbounded, and, as she has often since remarked, she then considered herself already well advanced towards her ideal. Marchesi's fear seemed to be that the new-comer would not take her art very seriously, and on this score she questioned her closely. Taking both the Australian's hands in hers, she said: "Mrs. Armstrong, are you serious?" "Yes," answered the other simply.

"Then," added Madame Marchesi with great emphasis and decision, "if you are serious, and can study with me for one year, I will make something extraordinary of you." The old lady pronounced the word "extraordinary" in two quite distinct words, as though by this means she could more forcibly impress on Mrs. Armstrong the possibilities of her future. The new student quickly gave ample evidence of absolute earnestness, untiring industry, and exceptional intelligence—qualities which were of incalculable value in the development of her natural musical equipment. She was consumed with ambition, and no self-sacrifice was too great if it brought her nearer the realization of her lifelong dream. At first Madame Marchesi was puzzled as to where she should place her latest pupil, who regarded it as a very happy chance that all the preparatory sections of the Marchesi school were full, thus giving an opportunity for her immediate entrance into the opera class without any of the usual preliminaries. To one so young and high-spirited as Mrs. Armstrong, to whom the adoption of a profession was, after all, more a matter of pleasure than of necessity, Paris—then little less than fairyland to her untravelled eye—must have made a strong demand for the dissipation of her time. But no plans for sight-seeing or amusement interfered with her exemplary industry. Every day she devoted eight hours at least to the study of music, as a matter of course using her voice very little, but using her brain in the mastery of technique, theory, and traditions.

During the early days of her studies in Paris, when going through the Mad Scene from "Lucia," Madame Marchesi was so severe with Melba that the pupil burst into tears, and, hurrying from the room,

MADAME MATHILDE MARCHESI AND MELBA

resolved to discontinue her lessons. Melba is not prone to hasty resolutions, and when she determines to do a thing, she generally does it. While waiting to banish the evidence of her recent tears, Marchesi came into the room, and, throwing her arms round the dissatisfied student, said: "Nellie, Nellie! you know I love you. If I bother you, it is because I know you will be great. Come back and sing as I wish." This affectionate and tactful appeal was sufficient for Melba, who has often said that, if she had gone away that day without a reconciliation, the whole trend of her career would probably have been altered.

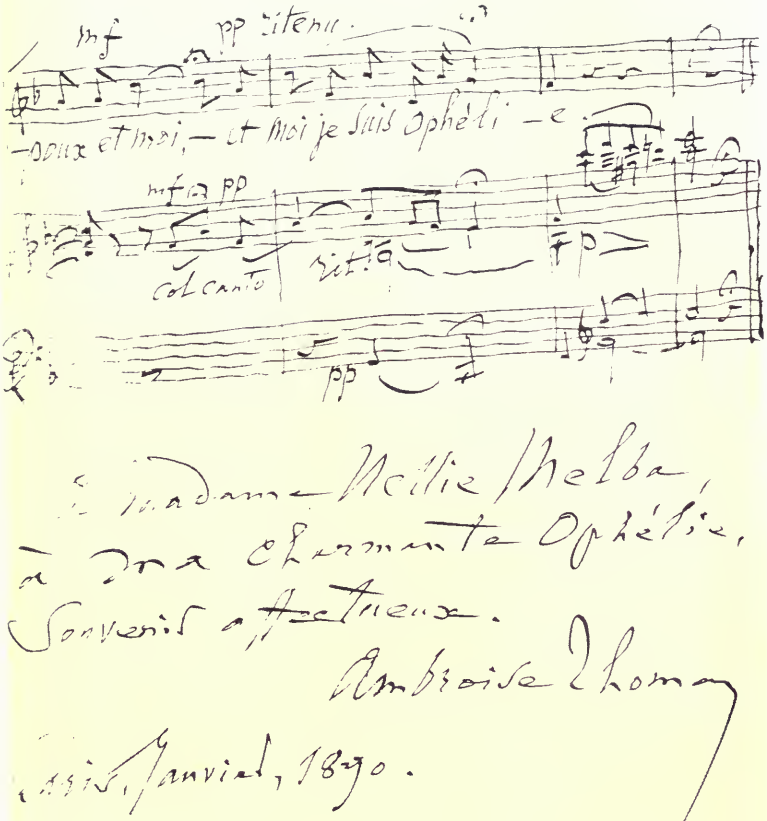
Unlike the great majority of students, Mrs. Armstrong's time was necessarily divided by the irresistible claims of a husband and infant son.

Madame Marchesi's attention and interest were lavishly given to her pupil, for whom she evinced as much affection and consideration as though she were her own daughter. At a *matinée musicale* given by the distinguished teacher at her residence in the Rue Jouffroy, Paris, during December of 1886, the Australian soprano was included in the programme, and for the first time sang under the name of Madame Melba—an appellation happily derived from Melbourne,* her native city, and since made famous in all parts of the civilized world. The idea of the change of name originated with the teacher, but the name itself was the suggestion of the pupil—both having every reason to be satisfied with a selection which had the merit of brevity and euphony, linked to that of ease of spelling and pronunciation for every nation in Europe. At this matinée Ambroise Thomas was

* Melba was born on the anniversary of the proclamation of Melbourne as a town by Governor Bourke, so that her own birthday and that of her native city occur on the same date.

present, and heard Melba sing the Mad Scene from his opera of "Hamlet," in the study of which he subsequently gave her great assistance. Even at this stage her efforts won warm approval from the general audience, and the newspaper critics who were present voiced their praise in the *Figaro*, *La Liberté*, *Le Sport*, and other publications. Ambroise Thomas, who took a deep interest in her later progress, encouraged her by warm compliments, and on that day began for her an invaluable friendship with the great composer, who in the succeeding years always addressed her as "ma belle belle." Another incident of that *musicale* was the engagement of Madame Melba by Mr. Maurice Strakosch for a term of years—a contract from which she was freed by his lamented death at a time when he and the management of the Brussels Opera-House were both presenting a claim for her services.

Strakosch, who was practically the first to recognize the remarkable gifts of Adelina Patti, was a man of unusual discrimination, and his first hearing of Melba made an instantaneous impression. He was enjoying a cigar in the smoking-room of Madame Marchesi's house, when the strains of "Caro Nome," as sung by the Australian student, rang out from the music studio. He put aside his cigar, listened in silence to the end, and then said to Marchesi's husband, the Marquis Castrone de la Rajata: "I want that voice. I do not know whether she is short or tall, pretty or plain: I want her." During these student days in Paris, Melba was fortunate enough to meet both Gounod and Leo Delibes, as well as Ambroise Thomas, and their interest and friendship had an enormous influence in the quickening of her artistic instinct.



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CHAPTER IV

"Nellie Melba, mon amie chérie et l'élève de mes rêves avant qu'elle fût mon idéal de l'artiste."—MATHILDE MARCHESI.

AFTER nine months' preparation in the Marchesi school, Madame Melba made her first appearance on the operatic stage at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels, on Thursday, October 13, 1887, as Gilda in Verdi's "Rigoletto." From the first she was announced as a "star," and the result of that evening more than justified the unusual course which the management had adopted with regard to the young singer. The supporting cast included Monsieur Engel as the Duke, and Monsieur Seguin as the jester; while the conductor's chair was occupied by Monsieur Dupont, who had already made a high reputation in London. The whole performance was admirable, but the success of Madame Melba, who had only had three stage rehearsals, stood out definite and emphatic, and the morrow found her already famous. News of her triumph was telegraphed all over Europe, and managers and other connoisseurs hurried to Brussels to hear her. Every paper in the Belgian capital accepted her as a singer born to greatness, and for whatever dramatic shortcomings she showed on this her first stage appearance the Brussels critics were ready with reasonably sympathetic explana-

tions. This attitude was all the more commendable since the traditions of the local opera had to a necessary extent been set at defiance, by the fact that Madame Melba sang in Italian instead of French—the official tongue of the Monnaie stage. Although she had a good knowledge of the French language, Melba at that time had not freed herself from an objectionable English accent. In order to introduce the Australian singer under the best possible conditions, the directors ran the risk of offending many of their patrons by making the above-mentioned concession. But even this circumstance, and the known fact of her inexperience, seemed to help, rather than hinder, the readiness of her acceptance by a generous public. The *Indépendance Belge* next day wrote of her as a "revelation," and described her voice as unique in quality, with a remarkable trill and perfect technique; while her person was described as elegant and distinguished, and her face mobile and sympathetic. Melba was also complimented on her intelligence in acting. The *Étoile Belge* was equally favourable, and, accepting her also as a revelation and a star, boldly placed the young Antipodean with "the profile of an Empress" in the same category with Patti and Nilsson. Veteran connoisseurs said they could not believe their ears when they heard her incomparable crystal voice. *La Chronique*, in dwelling on "the sensation of the day," alluded to the warm, velvety quality of her superb voice, her trill of mathematical exactitude, her distinguished and gracious presence and sympathetic face. *Le Menestrel* noted that she sang with remarkable sentiment, style, and expression. *La Réforme* was enthusiastic over the exceptional purity of her voice and the charm of her singing; and *La Patriote*, in a summary of her suc-

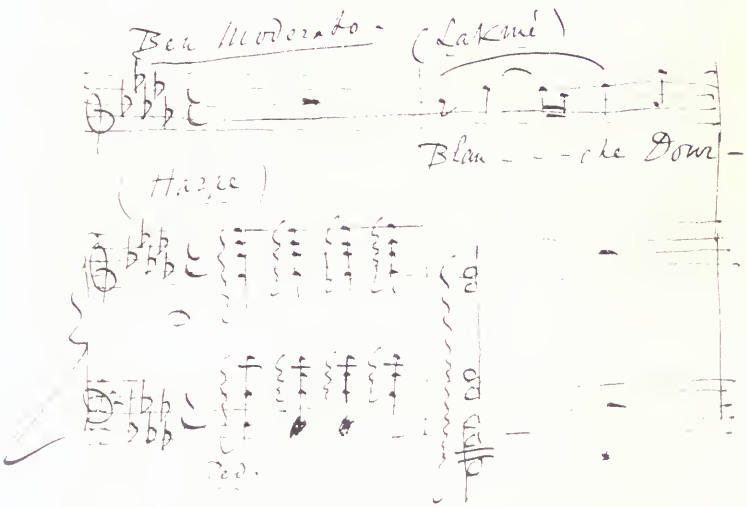
cess, said: "Before two years Madame Melba will be known as La Melba." All the papers were in the same vein, and, as it happened, within a single month the Brussels critics designated the young novice La Melba. Madame Marchesi, who had come to Brussels for her pupil's début, was delighted. The Queen of the Belgians attended the opera for Melba's second performance, and before the evening was over said: "It is the most beautiful voice I have ever heard." Her Majesty summoned Melba to her box to congratulate her, and thenceforward became her most enthusiastic patron.

The second opera in which Melba appeared at Brussels was "Traviata." Referring to this time, she has said: "How little I then realized the pitfalls and difficulties of the career I had chosen! The opinion of the management and the criticisms of 'Rigoletto' had been highly gratifying, so I was next given the leading rôle in 'Traviata.' The vocal demands of this part, although so heavy, I could reasonably fill; but the stage requirements were exceptionally exacting for a novice, and one of the newspapers in the next day's notice dwelt on my evident inexperience. This was the first paper I saw, and, although all the others were full of generous encouragement, I could not forget the one snub. I cried almost incessantly for a whole week at the recollection of this particular criticism. Then I took heart again, and threw myself into my studies with fresh vigour, resolved to work until I got to the top." The date of the "Traviata" production was November 9, 1887, only three weeks after her début, and in its criticism of this rôle the *Étoile Belge* said: "Those who were at the last representation of 'Rigoletto' were able to note the great progress made by

Madame Melba in the scenic interpretation of the part of Gilda, and how this exquisite singer was asserting herself as a comedian. Even they will have been surprised at the really remarkable manner in which she has composed the part of the 'Traviata.' We felt sure that she would invest the character with rare distinction, a charming physiognomy, and all the seductions of a marvellous voice, but we could scarcely expect that she would have so completely understood and rendered its touching features, the phases of passion and tenderness, and the heart-rending conclusion. Not only is it Violetta the perfect Italian singer, but it is also Dumas' Marguerite Gautier. Her person and deportment are perfectly adapted to the portrait as depicted by Dumas." The third character in which she was presented to the Belgian public was Lucia in Donizetti's opera of "Lucia di Lammermoor." The greatest interest was aroused by this announcement, and the house was crowded for the occasion. Her previous success was further emphasized, and her singing in the Mad Scene created an extraordinary impression.

While resident in Brussels, Monsieur Gevaërt became greatly attached to her little boy, and often invited the child to lunch with him on Sundays. One of these occasions provided an awkward moment for Melba. Close to the distinguished director's house a funeral procession passed, and, replying to a question from Master George, Monsieur Gevaërt, a fine, vigorous man, apparently in the prime of life, but with a manner grave even for his years, explained that the procession meant death, which came to all when very old. The child looked at his host, and, with embarrassing candour, said: "Tu dois mourir bientôt, parceque tu es bien vieux, tu sais."

C'était à Bruxelles. Le grand matin, je gravissais, à demi éveillé, le dédale des petites rues qui mènent au sommet de la "Montagne du Parc". J'entrais à l'Hotel de France où vous habitiez; je me mettais au piano; vous arriviez et après une poignée de main échangée sans presque dire un mot, vous attaquiez cette phrase de Lakmé, à son entrée:



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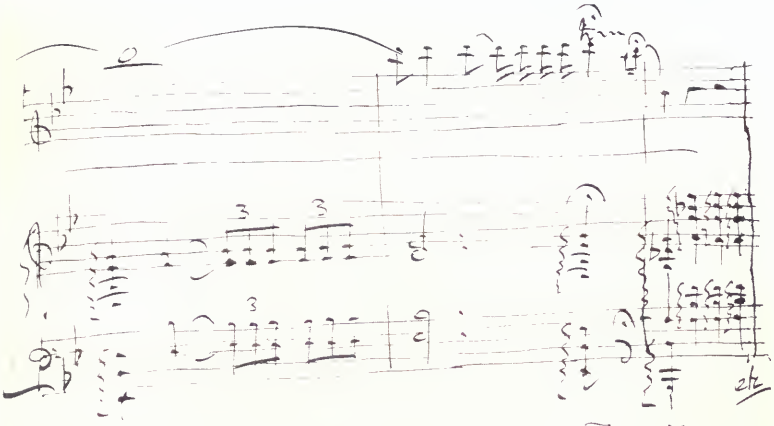


Et dans une sorte de rêverie
j'entendais votre voix idéale interprétant
cette invocation jusqu'au trille final,
avec une pureté surhumaine ; et
cela me causait l'impression peut-être
la plus vive et la plus délicieuse
que j'aie jamais ressentie à
l'audition d'une de mes œuvres.

Permettez-moi, chère Madame, de
vous rappeler ce souvenir en y joignant
l'expression de ma respectueuse amitié.

Léo Delibes

février 1890.

à Madame Nellie Melba.

FACSIMILE PAGE BY LÉO DELIBES

CHAPTER V

"Votre voix idéale avec une pureté surhumaine."—L. Delibes.

For some months Melba had been preparing Leo Delibes' opera "Lakmé," and had experienced the inestimable advantage of studying it with the composer himself. All the time possible she had devoted to perfecting herself in the French language, yet immediately before the production—which took place on March 8, 1888—the directors held a meeting, which Monsieur Delibes attended, at which it was discussed whether, in view of Melba's still unsatisfactory accent, it would be advisable to permit her to sing in that tongue. It was then that Delibes, who was enraptured with the young singer's interpretation of his work, broke in: "Qu'elle chante 'Lakmé' en français, en italien, en allemand, en anglais, ou en chinois, cela m'est égal, mais qu'elle la chante."

In spite of the slight difficulty with the language in which she then sang publicly for the first time, Melba made another striking success, and the verdict of the composer was repeated by the critics and the whole opera-going public. Madame Melba then rigorously continued her French studies under Mademoiselle Tordeus, a most accomplished professor, and, by giving six hours a day to this section

of her work, soon became a complete master of the language.

The last opera in which Melba was presented during her initial season at Brussels was "Hamlet," given at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in April 1888, before a brilliant audience. Here again the Australian singer was peculiarly favoured in having her study of the part personally guided by the composer, who had heard her as a student at the Marchesi school, and whose gratification over her impersonation led to his description, "The Ophélie of my dreams."

The Queen of the Belgians sent for Ambroise Thomas, and, in offering her congratulations, reminded him that she was then but renewing the greeting she had extended to him seventeen years earlier, when "Hamlet" had its initial representation in Brussels. Her Majesty also sent for Melba, to whom she repeated her assurances of unbounded admiration.

This opera led but to the repetition of all the eulogy that had been bestowed on her earlier rôles, and by this time Melba had become the spoiled child of the public, the darling of Brussels. Never had success been more immediate and emphatic; never had any prima donna so surely secured a place in the hearts of the people. It was, therefore, with very fair hopes that Madame Melba looked forward to an appearance in London; a young British singer coming before a British audience would, she argued, be sure of a sympathetic, if not a generous, verdict.

Photo. Dupont & Cie., Brussels

MELBA AS "LAKMÉ"

CHAPTER VI

"Melba's art is as spontaneous as the murmur of the brook. She sings because she must sing."—François Auguste Gevaërt.

Madame Melba made her operatic début at Covent Garden, London, on Thursday, May 24, 1888. Notwithstanding the immediate and sustained success which she had made at Brussels during the preceding season—a success to which Sir (then Mr.) Augustus Harris attached unflinching faith—her acceptance by the London critics was a matter of tardy growth. In operatic circles a good deal had been said beforehand about the remarkable beauty of Melba's voice, and the audience assembled for her first appearance expressed their appreciation in hearty and oft-repeated applause. The opera chosen for Melba's introduction to the London public was "Lucia di Lammermoor," which many of the critics considered too conventional a vehicle on which to base their definite judgment. Her second appearance was in "Rigoletto," with Scalchi and d'Andrade. It is curious to recall that the quality of the voice and the perfection of vocal method, on which they have since lavished every possible measure of praise, did not, for some reason or other, strongly appeal to the critical faculty as a body on the occasion of the young Australian singer's entrance into the ranks of Covent

Garden artists. In view of some subsequent expressions of opinion by the same critics as to Melba's dramatic qualities — opinions which in later years were once more reversed, and generously reversed—it is curious to recall that during her first London season, when she was practically without any stage experience, she was generally accepted as a promising actress. Brief extracts from the criticisms of the day on the first two rôles she essayed—Lucia and Gilda—are appended. The *Times :* " Madame Melba availed herself of the dramatic opportunities to considerable advantage, and especially the painful scene with her father in the Duke's palace was realized with truth as well as delicacy." The *Daily Telegraph :* " In moments of intense feeling she is capable of striking effects that seem spontaneous." The *Daily Chronicle :* " She appears to have mastered the dramatic features of the character she represents." The *Morning Post :* " Her admirable interpretation of the dramatic situation in the Marriage Scene inspired all those who were concerned with her." The *Standard :* " Her capacity as an actress is quite sufficient to render all possible justice to the character." The *Pall Mall Gazette :* " Accomplished in acting." The *Observer :* " Genuine dramatic instinct." *Vanity Fair :* " Displays much emotional power as an actress." The *Globe :* " Her acting was graceful, expressive, and dramatic." The *Weekly Advertiser :* " Acted with much dramatic force and true expression." The *Queen :* " The part really affords no scope for originality of treatment, but she at times gave evidence of ability to portray genuine dramatic passion." The *Morning Advertiser :* " Intelligent dramatically." The *Echo :* " Fine artistic

qualities, both from a vocal and dramatic point." The *Era*: "Charming simplicity and expression of style in keeping with the spirit of the character." The *Lady's Pictorial*: "Betrayed in certain scenes a strong dramatic instinct, while her impersonation generally was marked by admirable intelligence and feeling." The *Stage*: "As an actress she has much in her favour." The *Musical Standard*: "Shows dramatic power." The *St. James's Gazette*: "Her dramatic singing in the scenes with the Hunchback is very impressive." Still, as a young prima donna it was of the voice and her use of it that she most wished to hear. These expressions of opinion as to her acting capabilities, from those considered best qualified to judge, would have been accepted by any young actress and the public to whom she was appealing as a general acknowledgment of her dramatic gifts. The acceptance should have been all the more ready in view of the fact that, apart from about thirty performances (four weeks of the actress's ordinary routine) at Brussels, Melba had never been on a stage in her life. Further, she had never even seen grand opera until during her visit to Paris the year before, and, of the rôles she sustained at the Monnaie, the only one she had seen played was Gilda in "Rigoletto," at the close of which she naïvely confessed that she thought she could sing it better herself. She has never yet witnessed a performance of "Lucia," in which she was introduced to the London public, and with which her name, owing to her incomparable rendering of the Mad Scene, has ever since been intimately and peculiarly associated. Melba was naturally very much gratified by the unexpected appreciation of the dramatic side of her

work, which was then at a very undeveloped point; but the criticisms of her voice were entirely different from what she had anticipated, and she made no secret of her disappointment. Although to-day in a position of such splendid independence, Melba is nevertheless, and despite her natural perseverance and intrepidity, still easily discouraged, and must have been doubly so at the opening of her career. No one nowadays despises more than she the ridiculous adulation which is supposed to be the only coin of address acceptable to a famous prima donna; yet at that time there can be no doubt but that the criticism of praise would have accelerated her artistic expansion. On returning to Paris, Melba, even in the noon of her undiminished student activity, gave much thought to the attitude of the English critics, and, as a consequence, decided that she would relinquish her engagement at Covent Garden for the ensuing season. Mr. Augustus Harris openly stated that if any *foreign* artist had come to London with the same qualifications as Madame Melba, that foreigner would have been received by the English connoisseurs with unreserved enthusiasm. He was considerably disappointed over the lukewarm praise given to the young colonial, and with prophetic emphasis said: "In a little time they will clamour for Melba above all others, and, by gad! they'll have to pay for her, too."

"I wonder," said he, "do the English public ever realize the hardship of their apathy, more especially towards one of their own?" The difficulties of an operatic career for any girl are great, but in the case of an Anglo-Saxon they are enormously greater. Take the case of Melba. No matter where she sings

in opera for the rest of her life, she will have to use a foreign tongue, and will always be in a position of peculiar and trying isolation, for Britain's contributions to the operatic world are so few that they count for nothing. In an Italian company she will always be surrounded by Italians, in a French company by French, and in a German company by Germans—all zealous for their country's honour. When she sings in New York or London, the same conditions will obtain ; even at Covent Garden the very chorus is made up of foreigners, whose sympathies, like those of the conductor and the principal singers, naturally lean towards the performers of their native land. Even a sprinkling of her own people in any company where she was singing would be sure to give great courage to an English prima donna. Without that sprinkling she must often feel alone and disheartened. Why, even a man would. It's like Daniel in the lions' den. I know Melba is made of the stuff that will override these circumstances ; but I know, too, that the place she will take will be taken in the face of double difficulties—difficulties which foreign artists, who almost invariably sing in their native language, never encounter to anything like the same extent. Was not Miss Edwards [Signora Favanti], an English opera singer whose début at Her Majesty's in 1844 Lumley described as one long scene of triumph, eventually driven from the stage of her own country and broken in health by the jealousies, misrepresentations, and intrigues of her foreign colleagues and their partisans ?"

It is, however, worth recording that Mr. Harris was then a good deal nettled by the slowness of the

London public to recognize the gifts of any artists he presented. This conservatism he accounted inconceivable, especially in the case of the de Reszke brothers. "Their success was quicker than usual," he said, "but not complete as it should be. With Melba the same sort of thing has happened, and in the middle of the season she came to me with tears in her eyes, and, asking release from her engagement, returned to Brussels." It was subsequently claimed that this very precipitancy deprived the critics of adequate opportunity to appreciate her art, which is so peculiarly unobtrusive that it may be said to require a more intimate knowledge than the showy methods of more sensational singers.

In Australia, during the early days of her striving after artistic recognition, the public—apart from the critics—did not evince even ordinary appreciation of her gifts. In America it was only after she had made several appearances that her unusual qualities were fully recognized, and in England there was a still longer period of probation before the establishment of her great artistic position. This hesitancy on the part of English-speaking communities is all the more significant since in Paris, Brussels, Milan, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, Stockholm, and other centres where music is held to enjoy a wider and fuller understanding than among the Anglo-Saxon race, her success has in each case been instantaneous and emphatic.

In October 1888, Melba was back at the Théâtre de la Monnaie for her second season in Brussels, and the flattering reception she received on her reappearance in "Lakmé" was but a pledge of the ever-growing favour with which the Belgian public re-

garded her. During the third week of November she again essayed the part of Ophélie in "Hamlet," and the critical faculty of Brussels joined in the most cordial commendation of the advance she had made as an interpretative artist since her début. Every point of progress in voice, acting, bearing, or reading, was seized on, and held up for approval, and, spurred on by this encouragement, Melba made really admirable progress. Late in February of 1889 (probably February 25) Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet" was staged, in order to present the Australian singer as the daughter of the Capulets. Monsieur Engel was the Romeo of this production, in which Monsieur Maurice Renaud played the rôle of Capulet. Melba's success in the new rôle was nothing short of a triumph, and the Belgians lost no opportunity of showing their esteem of the singer, whom they had come to regard as one of themselves; while the Belgian Royal Family evinced a most unusual interest in the prima donna, who was regularly summoned to the Queen's box to receive Her Majesty's congratulations and encouragement. Up to the time of the tragic death of the Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, the Queen, who had an admirable knowledge of music, had been a regular attendant at the opera on Melba nights. During the Brussels season of 1889 the directors of the Paris Opera had endeavoured to secure Melba for their revival of "Romeo and Juliet," but the Brussels management very naturally refused to part with their strongest attraction, and eventually Madame Adelina Patti once again graced the stage of the French house in the Gounod revival. Although Melba was pressed with many demands on the little leisure she could snatch from the routine of

a busy student's life, she found time to give her valuable help at charity performances organized in Liége and elsewhere, and she also made successful appearances in oratorio. At the close of the opera term in April, the subscribers presented the departing prima donna with a beautiful diamond as a souvenir of their affection and admiration. To this gift she attaches particular significance, and has ever since treasured it as something specially valued and loved.

On the evening of her farewell at the Monnaie, Melba was so affected by the people's enthusiasm that she was obliged to bury her face in her hands to hide her emotion. She received more than sixty bouquets from her friends and admirers in Brussels, and the occasion naturally left an impression which fondly lingers in the great singer's memory. The English colony in the Belgian capital took a leading part in the demonstration to the young British singer who had won so unique a place in the favour of the city. On April 14, 1889, His Majesty the King of the Belgians presented her with the gold medal of the Brussels Conservatoire, and with this official token of the people's esteem she left the city of her operatic birth.

CHAPTER VII

"A la chère Juliette que j'espère, à Nellie Melba."—CHARLES GOUNOD.

THE termination of Melba's contract at Brussels found her free to accept an engagement at Paris, where she made her début at the Opera on Wednesday, May 8, 1889, as Ophélie in "Hamlet." The occasion was one fraught with much anxiety to the new-comer, who rightly estimated the value of a favourable verdict from the French public, and who under the circumstances of her comparative inexperience hardly dared to expect it. Added to her natural nervousness, there were many ulterior circumstances calculated to unnerve the most experienced. The production had been postponed more than once to admit of the appearance of the accepted exponent of the Queen, Madame Richard, who had been incapacitated by a long illness. Late on the afternoon of the day finally decided on for her début, Monsieur Lassalle, with whom Melba had rehearsed, was stricken with sudden hoarseness, and so she had to appear with a Hamlet whom she had never even seen; a difficulty accentuated further by the fact that she had not been able to have a single rehearsal with the orchestra. In the following day's review of the occasion, Monsieur August Vitu, the eminent music

critic of the *Figaro*, after alluding to these truly exceptional conditions, credited Melba with a success in the earlier portions of the performance, and "a triumph after the Mad Scene which literally moved the audience to frenzy." Continuing, he wrote:

"Madame Melba possesses a marvellous soprano voice, equal, pure, brilliant, and mellow, remarkably resonant in the middle register, and rising with a perfect *pastosita* [rich softness] up to the acute regions of that fairy-like major third which is called *ut*, *re*, *ni* above the lines. Her personal appearance was an advantage to her: tall, slender, gifted with an expressive physiognomy. She was applauded in her first duet with Hamlet, 'Doute de la lumière,' then in the air 'Mieux vaut mourir' and in the second duet, 'Ah! les serments ont des ailes,' to which she gave a dramatic expression rare among our Ophélies; but the occupants of the orchestra stalls, faithful to their temperate habitudes, were disposed to regard it as somewhat exaggerated. Madame Melba was, however, recalled after the fine trio in the third act which drives Ophélie to desperation.

"Up to this point all had gone smoothly, without rising above an excellent medium. But in the fourth act the veil was thrown aside. When Ophélie was seen to enter in her white garments, garlanded with flowers, and her fair hair floating down over her shoulders, Madame Melba was transfigured. It was Ophélie herself who charmed all eyes and touched all hearts while interpreting with supreme virtuosity that admirable scene—the most beautiful of all in the masterly work of Ambroise Thomas—which seems to have been dictated to him by the spirit of Shake-

MELBA AS OPHÉLIE

speare himself. That which ravished us was not alone the virtuosity, the exceptional quality of that sweetly timbred voice, the facility of executing at random diatonic and chromatic scales and the trills of the nightingale; it was also that profound and touching simplicity and the justness of accent which caused a thrill to pass through the audience with those simple notes of the middle voice, 'Je suis Ophélie.' And when at length the echoes of the lake wafted to us the last high note of the poor young creature, an immense acclamation saluted in Madame Melba the most delicious Ophélie that has been heard since the days of Christine Nilsson and of Fides Devries. She was recalled three times after the fall of the curtain, and, as statisticians, we have calculated that three recalls like those in the Opera at Paris are quite equivalent to seventy-five recalls in Italy at the very least.

"We might explain this evening, parodying two lines of Voltaire:

> "Each people in its turn has reigned upon the scene:
> Australia's hour has come, as ours has been."

Part of the usual contribution from "A Gentleman of the Orchestra," which always follows the formal critique in the *Figaro*, was as appended:

"I would rather tell you at once that this début was a triumph.

"No subscriber to the Opera since the days of Nilsson remembers to have seen the curtain raised three times after the Mad Scene; not by the *mot d'ordre* of a splendidly trained claque, but in response to the unanimous demand of the entire audience moved to its inmost fibres and quivering with emotion.

"Before conquering her public as an artist, Madame Melba had, from her first appearance, vanquished them as a woman. In fact, an admirable harmony subsists between the two. In that tall and handsome person, the look of profound trouble, the physiognomy so remarkably mobile, seem made to express dramatic passion. There breathes from her that perfume of romance without which there can be no true Ophelia, and that aristocratic grace which befits the fiancée of a King's son."

"Tall, distinguished, beautiful. The purity, the flexibility, the precision, and caressing sweetness of her voice are marvellous," was the verdict of Monsieur Johannes Weber in *Le Temps*.

Here and there, trivial critical reservations were made as to her foreign accent and other points in the interpretation; but the general verdict, as voiced by Messieurs Vitu, Johannes Weber, Victor Roger, Pierre Véron, Henri de Lapommeraye, Charles Le Roy, Victor Wilder, Louis Besson, George Launay, Léon Kerst, H. Izouard, and the other critics, and emphatically endorsed by an applauding public, was one of eulogy. The idol of Brussels by a single performance was already well advanced towards a similar popularity in Paris, where she was acclaimed as "uniting a voice of celestial purity to the grace of Ophélie and the art of Malibran."

In the audience on the night of her Paris début were a few Australians, including her two sisters, who in response to a cable had come from Melbourne for the occasion, and who were deeply moved by the success which Melba achieved. Speaking of it next day, she said: "I am intensely happy. It was delightful. After the fourth act I was recalled three times, a com-

pliment which they say has not been paid to any singer at the Grand Opera for over thirty years. My very first début in Paris was at a charity concert in the Salle Erard two years ago, given under the patronage of Gounod, by the pupils of Madame Mathilde Marchesi, who, by the way, taught me ten rôles in less than a year. She it was who got me my first operatic engagement, and in every way she has been more than kind. I think that charity appearance was a real luck-bringer for me. It was there that Monsieur Lapissida and Monsieur Dupont, the directors of the Brussels Opera, heard me, and decided on my engagement. They offered me 3,000 francs a month, which I considered almost extravagant, and I do not think any money will ever give me such pleasure. Here in Paris the directors hesitated to fix on 4,000 francs (£160) a month for my contract until after my début. So much the better for me, as now they are giving me 6,000 francs. Madrid and Berlin have offered me higher terms, much higher terms, and to-day the manager of the Gaîté, inspired by the success of my appearance last night, has also volunteered a better contract; but money is not everything, so I shall stay on at the Opera.

"When I sang here two years ago as a Marchesi pupil at the charity concert, two or three of the critics who heard me then were very kind. An unkind criticism makes me unhappy, but to-day I have no reason to be depressed. All the critics are good to me, some very good. One or two are a little disappointed that I am a foreigner, and an Australian at that. However, I am proud of it, and I know the Parisians will excuse my having been born away from their beloved France. This beautiful bouquet was sent to

me by the Australians in Paris, and gave me more pleasure than all the rest put together. I want always to associate any success I may have with the place where I was born, Melbourne, and that is why I have called myself 'Melba.'"

The general cordiality of the French critics, which increased with each successive appearance, made Melba ponder further on the apathy of the connoisseurs of her own race; but individual assurances of appreciation continued to come from London, and, while wavering as to the future, she was fortunate enough to receive a most kind and gracious expression of opinion from some distinguished music-lovers, which resulted in a speedy decision to try another season in London.

On taking up her residence in Paris prior to her appearance at the Opera, it was represented to Melba that her artistic advance would be blocked unless she took dramatic lessons from a certain teacher whose influence was considered paramount. No one had ever been able to make headway independent of this professor, she was told. "That may be," said Melba, "but I will not be coerced. I shall take my lessons from whom I like, when I like, and how I like, and I will also take the consequences;" which she did, and these consequences proved that young students are too often tyrannized over by interested hirelings who flourish on misrepresentations of this kind, and whose very existence depends on the vicious conditions which the timidity of their too easy dupes maintain. Happily, from the very outset Melba showed clear confidence in her ability to succeed, and a complete independence of those considerations of money and influence to which so many students needlessly make sacrifice.

CHAPTER VIII

"Combien je garderai bon souvenir, chère Madame, de ce joli matin de mai, où je vous attendais dans votre petit salon, la fenêtre ouverte, en écoutant les oiseaux chanter dans les grands arbres du jardin. . . . Vous êtes arrivée . . . et vous avez chanté . . . et les petits oiseaux se sont tus, furieux de la concurrence et charmés par votre voix."—COMTE DE FONTENAILLES.

FOR her reappearance at Covent Garden on June 6, 1889, Melba selected the opera 'Rigoletto,' in which Monsieur Lassalle impersonated the jester for the first time in England. The audience for the occasion was of very limited proportions, for which a violent thunderstorm may have been to some extent responsible. Her next performance was as Juliet in Gounod's opera "Romeo and Juliet," given on June 15 for the first time in the French language, an innovation which was largely helped by Melba's readiness and enthusiasm, of which Augustus Harris made grateful acknowledgment. Monsieur Jean de Reszke was the Romeo of the occasion, and Monsieur Édouard de Reszke the friar, with Signor Mancinelli as conductor, and the London revival under the new linguistic conditions was an instantaneous success. In casting Melba for Juliet, Augustus Harris was largely influenced by the success with which she had performed the rôle in Brussels during the preceding season, and his emphatic expression of confidence in

her ability to charm London in this character was abundantly justified by results. Throughout the evening her singing, acting, and appearance elicited the warmest admiration ; at every opportunity she was rewarded with vehement enthusiasm, especially after the waltz air " Je veux vivre," which she gave with an exquisite lightness and vocal purity that could hardly have been equalled. The audience were entirely captivated by the new Juliet, and the unrivalled beauty of her voice and the perfection of her vocalization were next day acknowledged in all the newspapers. With regard to her preceding performance as Gilda, the *Standard* wrote : " Madame Melba seems absolutely incapable of a false intonation, and is almost unsurpassed in the purity and sweetness of her tones. Her shake is close and even, the few embellishments she introduces are almost invariably in good taste, and in all she does sincerity and dramatic force are conspicuous. That ' Caro Nome ' could ever have been better sung than last night is difficult to believe ; none but the warmest terms of admiration can do justice to the performance." The criticisms of " Romeo and Juliet " were in the same vein, and their eulogy had a special significance in view of the fact that she was closely following Madame Adelina Patti, whose great name threw a certain glamour around every musical undertaking with which she was identified.

Melba's position was enormously advanced by the " Romeo and Juliet " performance, and the recognition which she at one time had despaired of winning from the critics of London was now undoubtedly hers. By command of Queen Victoria, a state concert was arranged at Buckingham Palace

MELBA AS JULIET

on June 28, and Melba was summoned to take part, but at the last moment was unable to sing owing to a bad cold. A gala performance was announced for July 2 at Covent Garden, in honour of the Shah of Persia, and His Majesty King Edward (then Prince of Wales) made known his wish that Melba should sing the "Je veux vivre" before the royal party. She was also on the programme for the Mad Scene from "Lucia di Lammermoor," which was conducted by Signor Randegger. The charm of her appearance and the elegance of her manner, enhanced by her operatic success, made a strong demand for social favour, and in the salons of the most exclusive hostesses she quickly became a *persona grata.*

During a performance of "Faust" this season (1889), Melba's pluck averted a serious accident at Covent Garden. It was in the first act, before Marguerite's real entry, so that she had no special call to be present at all. One of the wings in the Study Scene caught fire, and a sheet of flame was clearly visible to the whole audience. Before the threatened panic had time to develop, Melba stepped out and said a few words, which completely reassured those who were beginning to get frightened. The fire was put out, and the opera went on all right, but it was Melba's cool resourcefulness that had saved the situation.

The opera season closed with "Romeo and Juliet" on July 27, specially interesting as the wedding-day of the Duke and Duchess of Fife. A large number of royalties, including the Prince and Princess of Wales, the King of the Hellenes, the Grand Duke of Hesse, and the Crown Prince of Denmark, attended the performance, all wearing the festal favours of that

afternoon's ceremony. At the close of the opera, in addition to the National Anthem, the orchestra played Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."

The same year Melba returned to Paris under the new contract with the Opera directors, which allowed her certain privileges as to foreign appearances during the course of the Parisian season. She established her headquarters in a beautiful apartment at 9, Rue de Prony, near the Parc Monceau, where her little son, who was at school in England, came to spend the holidays with his mother, and where she received many of the great people who illumined the art life of the city. The street on which her apartment looked out led directly to the Boulevard Malesherbes, wherein was the residence of Gounod, whose friendship largely influenced the trend of her career. Sarah Bernhardt and Mathilde Marchesi were comparatively near neighbours, and Artot Padilla lived but a few doors away. In the appointments of her new home Melba followed the styles peculiar to the period of Marie Antoinette and Josephine. Accustomed to refined surroundings from her birth, and with excellent taste in household decoration, nothing was chosen because of its cost, and the whole atmosphere of the place was one of good taste and desirable solidity. During her residence at Brussels, Melba had made frequent trips to Paris to avail herself of the guidance of Gounod in the study of his operas "Faust" and "Romeo and Juliet," and now that she had become a neighbour she was a frequent visitor at his home. He minutely explained to her the difference between the characters of Marguerite and Juliet, dwelling especially on the simplicity of the poor peasant girl, who at first was too unso-

MELBA'S BEDROOM, SHOWING MARIE ANTOINETTE BED

phisticated to understand, and later too timid to admit, her ready adoration of Faust. Juliet, he pointed out, was entirely different, and to the daughter of the Capulets he attributed unblushing forwardness. "Juliet était une affrontée," he often repeated, and, according to his reading, Mademoiselle Capulet deliberately set herself the task of storming the citadel of young Montague's heart. During these invaluable lessons Gounod always wore the little velvet cap with which his photographs have made the public familiar, and, in order to give Melba a clearer idea of his meaning, he would in turn sing all the parts. Thus, in his explanation of "Romeo and Juliet" to his favourite, he would in succession be Romeo, Juliet, Capulet, the friar, and the nurse. On one of these occasions, in humming over the passage,

> "Qui reste à sa place
> Et ne danse pas,
> De quelque disgrace
> Fait l'aveu tout bas,"

the composer, who, despite his advanced years, was always ready to make a joke, whispered at rehearsal in Melba's ear, with a smile: "Ce voulait dire qu'ils avaient des cors au pied." He took the keenest interest in everything she did at the rehearsals, and on the evenings of the performances he would sit in the directors' box and watch and listen intently. When she particularly pleased him by any phrase or scene, he would subsequently reward her with a smile and embrace. Speaking of this time, Melba says: "I thank God for having met and known Gounod. He awakened in me my artistic sense. He was so broad, so human, and had so much to give."

As for Gounod, he was unreserved in his praise of Melba's interpretation; he assured her and his friends that she brought to the work all the qualities he had imagined for his heroine, and on a photograph which he gave her at the time he wrote: "To the dear Juliet for whom I hoped—to Nellie Melba.—CH. GOUNOD."

In the study of "Faust" Melba further had the inestimable advantage of being assisted by Sarah Bernhardt, who took infinite trouble in preparing the young singer for the adequate realization of the dramatic side of the character, and who has since had the gratification of seeing Melba's interpretation of Marguerite accepted as a performance of striking beauty and sincerity. The great French tragédienne, after explaining and suggesting the possibilities of the part, was always careful to add: "You must not imitate me. Do it your own way. You must be natural. Be yourself." Those who are familiar with Melba's acting, especially in "Faust," "Romeo and Juliet," "Aïda," "Traviata," and "La Bohème," can realize to what excellent use she put the coaching so kindly given her by her distinguished mentor.

One of her great gratifications of this period was the receipt of the silver medal of the Paris Conservatoire. During the season she availed herself of the privilege extended to her by the directors of the Opera, and early in 1890 accepted an engagement for four performances at Monte Carlo, the terms being much in advance of any remuneration hitherto given her.

CHAPTER IX

"À la plus charmante femme; à la plus délicieuse artiste; à la voix de pur cristal, la plus vive sympathie."—SARAH BERNHARDT.

IT will be seen that even before she was entirely accepted as a popular prima donna, Melba had become a welcome figure in society, and the manner in which she has always kept up her social duties is one of the most surprising points in her career. She has never allowed herself to be exploited socially because of her professional celebrity. In the fashionable world she fills her place independent of her art, and the hospitality she receives she returns on a scale of corresponding elegance. As it is in London now, so it was in Paris during the number of years she made her home there.

In the happy enjoyment of the honours which the French people continued to heap upon her, Melba, by courtesy of the Opera management, resumed her place at Covent Garden for the season of 1890, the opera of "Romeo and Juliet" being listed for her *rentrée* on June 3, owing to the extraordinary success she had made in it the year before. From every point of view the conception of Juliet was accepted as complete and satisfying, and the *Times*, writing of this particular performance, said: "Nothing finer is to be seen on the operatic stage

than the impersonation of the lovers by Monsieur Jean de Reszke and Madame Melba. So complete a union of vocal with dramatic power as exists in both artists is granted to few singers, and it may be imagined that the three beautiful duets which form the chief point of interest in the two parts were perfectly sung." A week later Madame Melba made an important step in her career by her first appearance as Elsa in "Lohengrin," of which the *Pall Mall Gazette* tersely said: "She plays the part, sings the music, and looks the character, to perfection." It is worth recording that for this performance she had only one piano rehearsal, and none at all with the orchestra.

Although in the previous year, and again on June 26 of this year, she had the compliment of being summoned to take part in state concerts at Buckingham Palace, and in the gala performance to the Shah of Persia, it was for the afternoon of July 4, 1890, that Melba first received the honour of a command from Queen Victoria to sing privately to Her Majesty, who was then in residence at Windsor Castle. Melba and her comrades, Messieurs Jean and Édouard de Reszke and Lassalle, were received with the utmost graciousness by the aged Sovereign, to whom she sang, among other things, "Caro Nome" and the waltz song from "Romeo and Juliet." She and Monsieur Jean de Reszke took part in the duet from "Traviata," and when the Empress Frederick, who came in late, asked for extra numbers, it goes without saying that they were given *con amore*. When interviewed concerning the Windsor visit, Melba devoted most of her attention to the doings of the de Reszkes and Lassalle, and of Mancinelli, who had played their accompaniments.

Replying to a question put to her at the Hôtel Métropole, where she then had her headquarters, she said: "Well, of course, we were all rather nervous, but the Queen has such a gentle, pleasant manner; she puts one at ease without any ado, and was full of kindly compliment to us all. Mendelssohn was right in describing her as a connoisseur of good music, but, as you may naturally suppose, her sympathies lean rather more to the old Italian than the new school. We sang the whole of the last act of 'Faust,' although, according to the programmes published in the papers, only the trio was performed. Jean de Reszke, whom the Queen described as the finest tenor since Mario, sang the 'Preislied,' and the Empress Frederick, who was most kind and charming, said that one number made her long to hear the entire opera ["Die Meistersinger"], which was then being beautifully given at Covent Garden." From the Queen Melba received a pretty jewelled souvenir of the visit.

"I do not have to trouble much about my voice," continued Melba on the same occasion. "On the contrary, I enjoy my life, and do not make myself a slave to my profession. Only the other day I was at an important luncheon where the host had the honour of entertaining the Prince of Wales [King Edward VII.]. All the afternoon I was talking and laughing, yet when a telegram came from Mr. Harris asking me to sing that night in 'Faust,' as Jean de Reszke was not well enough to appear in 'Le Prophète,' I was quite ready. When I had seemed to hesitate for a moment, His Royal Highness said: 'Do sing; I shall be there.' I did, and, in spite of my earlier exertions, the performance went off well.

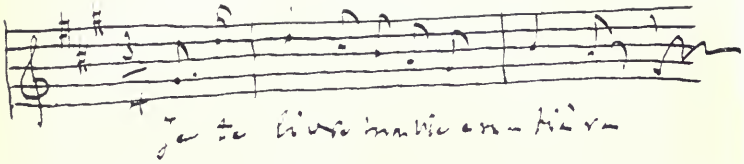
"The Prince has been extremely kind to me ever since I came to England. He is, indeed, the most tactful, clever, and courteous of men, always ready to grant a favour even to those who have no special claim on his consideration, and scrupulously exact in carrying out anything to which his word may even only appear to bind him. As for the Princess, she is simply delightful, so gracious and appreciative. How is it, I wonder, that, wherever one may see her, she is always the prettiest woman in sight ?"

Goring Thomas's "Esmeralda," which was staged on July 12, was another Melba novelty for that season, and was given with a French text for the first time.

For this occasion the composer made sundry alterations in his score, adding a whole scene, which, when all is said and done, did not add much to the dramatic force of the work; for it is a prison scene which cannot fail to remind all who hear it of the similar scene in "Faust," and the more so since there is an invisible chorus of female voices behind the scenes. The soprano air at the beginning of the scene is of exquisite quality, and brought out the tender pathos of Melba's voice to perfection. The succeeding duet with Frollo, which she sang with Lassalle, is of less musical value, and has not the dramatic vigour that the situation requires. An "Air des Cloches" replaced Quasimodo's charming "What shall I do for my Queen ?" and the dénouement, originally a conventional "happy ending," was given some plausibility by being made tragic.

Melba bestowed infinite pains on the words and music, which latter she considered charming, although catchy and hard to learn. Her reading of the

(Juliette)



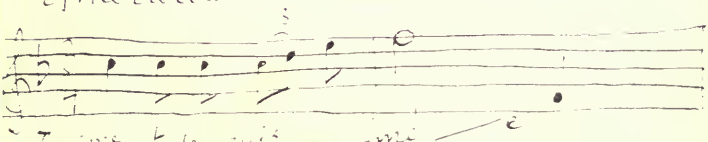
(Roméo – 2me acte).

à mon amie Nellie Melba.

1er Janv. 1890.

Ch. Gounod

Emeralda



A Phoebe I shall never seem hear sung without thinking of your heavenly voice – & lovely singing of the same. A Goring Thomas

FACSIMILE GREETINGS FROM GOUNOD AND GORING THOMAS

part was clever, and her singing was, of course, one of the great charms of the performance, which was witnessed by the Prince and Princess of Wales, and which resulted in ardent calls for the composer.

The musical world was given another chance to test her quality on July 21, when she made her first London appearance in the French version of "Hamlet." The *Daily Telegraph* held that the result both in virtue of musical and dramatic talent ranked Madame Melba's Ophélie amongst the best; while the *Times*, though considering her dramatic impersonation inferior to Nilsson's, held it vocally to be one of Melba's best parts, the Mad Scene being a marvellous and brilliant display of delicate and perfect vocalization.*

Further éclat was given to Melba's rapidly growing favour by her singing at Marlborough House on July 25 before the Prince and Princess of Wales.

The season closed on July 28 with a performance of "Carmen," in which Jean de Reszke sang the rôle of Don José for the first time in England.

It may be recorded here that Melba's advent at Covent Garden was most welcome to the staff of the theatre, who often chafed under the conditions of superficiality and affectation which leading singers, as a rule, had hitherto thought it desirable to uphold. Miss Alice Joseph, the concert agent, who during Melba's early years at Covent Garden was private secretary to Augustus Harris, said one day to a caller

* "There she incontestably proved her right to be regarded as one of the finest artists who have ever appeared at Covent Garden. Perfect vocal art and high dramatic intelligence were equally and happily blended in a climax which fairly took a somewhat cold house by storm. We have heard nothing like it since Nilsson sang the part. It saved the opera."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

at his office: "Melba is a revelation to most of us; she is so reliable and so reasonable. The stage hands love her. She is simple and natural, neither shy nor bouncing. During her first season many of the musical people said she was the coming 'star,' but while she had sufficient confidence in herself, she never said so. I recall her exclaiming one day during that season that her great ambition was to sing with the de Reszkes. When the following years brought her the fame she desired, she never altered, but retained a fine combination of dignity and simplicity. Unlike the average artist, she had no superstitions when she came to us, and had even selected the thirteenth of the month for her operatic début; but I think she cultivated a few in deference to the 'Governor,' for later on she refused to be photographed in any costume until after the public production. I remember on her birthday one season he handed her a packet of letters which had been addressed to the theatre. Many of them were messages of kind wishes—among them a card on which was a peacock's feather in bold design. As she was drawing it from the envelope, he caught sight of it, and, with an expression of exaggerated horror, snatched it from her hand, and tore it into little bits before she could even see from whom it came. 'We can't have anything unlucky like that in the house,' he explained to Melba, who was greatly surprised and amused."

CHAPTER X

"La prima donna incontestée de notre Académie nationale de musique [Paris]."—EMMANUEL BOURGUET.

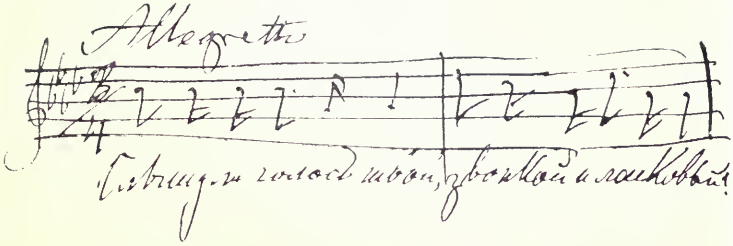
MELBA'S only appearance at the Opéra Comique, Paris (Théâtre des Nations), was on the occasion of the matinée performance of "Carmen" given on December 11, 1890, to raise funds for a statue to perpetuate the memory of the composer Bizet, whereat she established a precedent for great prima donnas by electing to sing the brief part of Micaela, which had hitherto been interpreted by artists of secondary importance. The title rôle on that day was sung by Madame Galli-Marié, the original French exponent. The receipts of the matinée reached the exceptional sum of 42,000 francs. At Covent Garden Melba subsequently volunteered to enact Micaela to the Carmen of Madame Emma Calvé, the brilliant successor to Madame Galli-Marié; and later on in America, when at the head of her own company, she yet again followed this commendable example by singing the minor character to the lead of Mademoiselle Zélie de Lussan. Modesty, reasonable self-effacement in the interests of art, and a willingness to share the glamour of her position with great or obscure colleagues, are qualities which Melba has always shown in such a degree as to excite the

incredulity of those who are more familiar with the real or imaginary stories of violent professional jealousy.

The death of Leo Delibes in Paris on January 16, 1891, was a sincere sorrow to Melba, who owed much to his kind interest. By the death of the Earl of Lytton that year another tie that had closely bound her to Paris since she first went there to study was broken. During Lord Lytton's term at the Embassy he and his brilliant wife, whose interest permeated the whole British colony, had been warm friends to the young British singer, who on more than one trying occasion was supported by the sympathy and encouragement of Lady Lytton.

In 1890 Melba received the unique honour of an imperial summons from the Czar Alexander, desiring her to appear at the Imperial Opera, St. Petersburg, where, during February 1891, with Jean and Édouard de Reszke, she took part in a series of brilliant productions, which included "Lohengrin," "Faust," and "Romeo and Juliet." In accordance with the command of the Emperor, these operas were newly mounted with the greatest regard for the completeness of every detail, and extraordinary interest was manifested by the public. Melba's personal and artistic success was entirely beyond all ordinary measure, and the critics and the public generally exceeded the bounds of the most sanguine anticipations in the eulogy and attentions which they lavished upon her.

Rubinstein, who was at that time engaged at the Conservatoire, and in failing health, heard many stories of Melba's operatic triumphs, and he wrote to her saying that, as he was too ill to come and hear



FACSIMILE PAGE BY RUBINSTEIN

her, he hoped she would be kind to a feeble old musician, and come to him. Her immediate reply was that she would be honoured to act on his suggestion, and at the earliest possible moment she made him a visit, and sang to him everything he wished to hear. Despite failing eyesight, he was able to play to most of her numbers, and this circumstance made the occasion one of particular interest for Melba, who found in the great pianist a really superb accompanist.

The Imperial Family honoured her with numerous evidences of their favour, and the souvenirs which she carried away from Russia included a turquoise and diamond bracelet from the Grand Duchess Paul, a diamond and sapphire bracelet from the Grand Duke Alexis, and an exquisite bracelet of uncommon design from His Majesty the Emperor Alexander. This latter ornament, which she always wears and regards as a mascot, is composed of engraved diamond cubes and large pearls strung together on a slender chain of platinum and gold.

Although Melba possesses a famous collection of jewels, she does not value them much as a means of personal adornment, but from an artistic standpoint could be easily moved to enthusiasm by the beauty of their colouring, shape, or setting. Pearls are her favourite, and one of the finest in her possession is a wonderful solitaire ring presented to her by Herr von Mendelssohn, a kinsman of the great composer, at whose house she sang during a visit to Berlin.

The Grand Duke Alexis gave in her honour a dinner at which the flowers and gold plate were magnificent. His Imperial Highness subsequently personally conducted Melba through the show apart-

ments of the palace, and during the evening she sang for her imperial hosts.

According to local authorities, no singer had ever so quickly captured the favour of the St. Petersburg public, and when she left on her return to Paris, she was made the recipient of an extravagant farewell ovation, one which the prima donna recalls to this day as among the most remarkable of her career. A chair had to be placed in the wings to enable her to rest between the recalls. On the night of her farewell performance a large crowd assembled outside the stage-door, and when she entered the carriage they heaped it so high with flowers that she was almost invisible amid the banks of blossoms. A band of music-loving youths belonging to the Russian aristocracy spread their coats on the snow-covered footpath for her to walk on, and indulged in all sorts of other complimentary excesses. She was surrounded by scores of admirers who had brought photographs, programmes, and cards on which to beg her autograph. The borrowed pencil with which she made the signatures was eventually returned to the owner, who was compelled to break it and divide the pieces among importunate friends. The crowd still pressed close around her, and struggled to shake hands, and eventually, in response to the calls of some enthusiasts, she took off her gloves, and threw them to the claimants, who portioned the scraps among the youths who, like so many Raleighs, had spread their coats beneath her feet. Such was the manner of her departure from St. Petersburg!

Melba's season in Russia added largely to her reputation, and when she returned to Paris to resume her place at the Opera, her position was still more

DONIZETTI CENTENARY, BERGAMO, 1897
PARIS CONSERVATOIRE, 1891 PARIS CONSERVATOIRE, 1890
BRUSSELS CONSERVATOIRE, 1889

secure. If Brussels had a claim on her because it was in that city she made her first appearance in opera, Paris had come to explain that it had the prior claim, since it was the training and atmosphere of Paris that had given to the Brussels début the possibilities of success. The critics had now no terms of reservation in their review of Melba's art. The establishment of her home in their midst gave unqualified satisfaction; she was cited as a typical Parisian, and amid the acclamation of the art world she again received the silver medal of the Paris Conservatoire.

During a performance of "Lucia" one evening, the tenor, who had been ill, endeavoured to go on with his part rather than disappoint the management, who had no deputy, but found himself voiceless during the great duet in the first act. In order to hide her colleague's unfortunate lapse and give the manager a little time to help the situation, Melba with great resourcefulness held the opera together by singing Edgardo's music as well as her own, and thus kept the scene going until the fall of the curtain. It happened, oddly enough, that Monsieur Engel, who had sung the part with Melba in Brussels, was among the audience, and his kindly volunteered services were gladly accepted for the completion of the opera. Madame Carnot, who was also of the audience that evening, was one of the first to notice Melba's efforts to help her comrade, and she was most enthusiastic in her appreciation of the prima donna's kindly presence of mind.

CHAPTER XI

"The incomparable Melba."—HENRY IRVING.

BEFORE Melba had advanced far on her professional career, the illusions natural to a girlhood free from care had vanished one by one, and in repose her features already bore indefinable evidence that the thorns of poor human experience had pressed their sharpness through her rose-strewn path. The expression of sadness still lingers on her face, but through her cheerfulness and good-fellowship she is mainly known to the world in general, and even to the majority of her friends, as a woman whose habitual vivacity provokes infectious gaiety. Reticent as to the sorrow which has been her portion, she is inversely demonstrative as to the joy which is her share, and loves to surround herself with those who despise the mean streets of existence and gambol in the sunny avenues of life.

If Melba has always shown delightful readiness to appreciate the art of her operatic companions, it is also pleasant to note that the greatest among her fellows have been no less generous in their estimation of her personal and musical gifts. What more charming testimony than this ?—

"La nature vous a doué d'une voix d'or, positivement la plus belle de notre temps ; vous êtes musicienne, vous êtes femme charmante. Toutes ces

qualités peuvent être appréciées par le public, mais ce que je sais, moi, c'est que vous êtes la meilleure des camarades, et que je garderai un éternal souvenir de nos rélations artistiques et amicales. Comptez toujours sur votre devoué

"JEAN DE RESZKE."

An operatic event of singular brilliance was the gala performance held at Covent Garden on July 8, 1891, by command of Queen Victoria, to celebrate the state visit of the German Emperor and Empress. The naval, military, and political clubs in Pall Mall, and other buildings along the route, were magnificently illuminated, and a guard of honour of the 1st Battalion of the Coldstreams was drawn up in front of the Opera-House on the arrival of the Imperial and Royal party. Every corner of the building was turned into a bower of flowers, and it was conceded that no performance had ever been surrounded with such circumstances of splendour. It was a matter of gratification to Madame Melba to receive Her Majesty's command for such an occasion, and it was in the rôle of Juliet that she appeared before the illustrious visitors. The Royal circle included the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, the Duke of Clarence, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke and Duchess of Fife, Princesses Victoria and Maud of Wales, the Duchess of Albany, Princess Henry of Battenberg, and the Duchess of Teck.

One night, during the last act of "Romeo and Juliet," the extra curls which Melba had pinned on to supplement her own hair became unfastened, and fell on the stage. Jean de Reszke lessened the

embarrassment of the occasion by hiding the errant tresses under his feet and kicking them aside at an opportune moment. A few days later, when the incident was the subject of a bantering conversation at Lady de Grey's, the Princess of Wales (Queen Alexandra) said, with an amused smile, to Melba: "And they were such nice curls, too." On another occasion, when the curtain was still down on the Tomb Scene, Jean de Reszke went on the stage to speak to Melba. While so engaged, the curtain was rung up, and awkwardly disclosed his premature presence in the tomb. Not for an instant did he betray the confusion of the situation. With perfect resourcefulness he altered the text so easily and so effectively that few among the audience could realize that there had been any untoward development in the action of the opera.

From the opening to the close of the Covent Garden season she sang with all her wonted brilliancy, and when she left for her home in Paris was seen off by a largely augmented gathering of friends.

The routine of Melba's professional life was pleasantly varied in the spring of 1892, when she won first prize for the most beautifully decorated car in the Battle of Flowers at Nice. Her artistic taste and original ideas were well illustrated in the colouring and design of the ornamental scheme, and along the carnival course the gay equipage was greeted with acclamation. The Prince and Princess of Monaco, who had honoured her with many attentions, were among the first to offer their congratulations on her carnival victory, which was especially popular among the English and French visitors then on the Riviera. The same evening she sang Lucia at the opera, and there

was an added warmth in the welcome tendered her.

Like the majority of Australians, Melba loves horses, and expresses the opinion that if she were a man she would endeavour to excel at polo. Although a great believer in open-air life, she has, nevertheless, never taken any considerable part in outdoor games.

CHAPTER XII

"Imaginez une voix délicieuse, d'un timbre pur comme le cristal, venant se poser sur les lèvres de la cantatrice, avec la délicatesse aérienne d'un oiseau, et là s'égrenant en trilles et en vocalises, sans que la fée qui laisse tomber les perles de sa bouche trahisse le moindre effort ou la gêne la plus légère."—VICTOR WILDER.

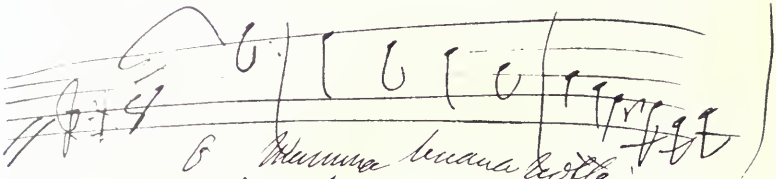
MELBA appeared in Sicily, in "Traviata," at Palermo, during the spring of 1892, of which she retains an uncommon souvenir in the shape of a solid gold visiting-card, bearing her name and an inscribed message from her impresario, who chose this way of keeping in her mind her initial professional experience in the historic island.

Incidental to the engagement there was nothing of a peculiarly noteworthy character, but Melba had some interesting personal experiences. Always a bad sailor, she was unlucky enough to have a very disagreeable water journey from Naples to Palermo, and arriving at her hotel about five o'clock in the morning, feeling very tired, she at once went to bed, but was soon aroused from her sleep by the occupant of the next room, who played through several times the 'cello part of "Braga's Serenata." Always alert for music, she speedily aroused herself, and almost involuntarily sang the vocal part to the 'cellist's further repetition of the well-known air. At the close her neighbour in the next room called out: "You sang

[illegible] M. Shadwell [illegible] Ebury St., S.W.

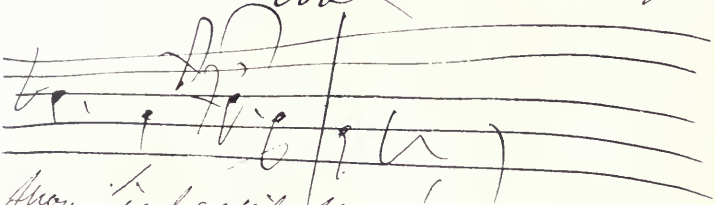
MELBA AS "VIOLETTA" IN "TRAVIATA"

Andte con moto



O mamma buona notte io segno il

melba



suon io segno il suon!

Alla Signora

Nelle Melba

omaggio di

Gaetano Braga Palermo

3 del 1892.

UNSIGHT PAGE BY GUETANO BRAGA

that very well. Who are you ?" The singer answered: "I am Nellie Melba. Who are you ?" "Braga," was the response, and in this curious fashion came about her meeting with the Italian musician. During this season she also sang at the Argentine Theatre, Rome, in the opera of "Lucia di Lammermoor."

Owing to her many engagements in other countries, Melba's house in Paris was at this time little more than a *pied-à-terre* for her; but she always made a point of being there during the holidays of her little son, who was at school in England, and whose home-comings were the brightest light in these days of ever-growing brilliancy. Every detail that could add to his well-being and increase his none too abundant physical vigour was the mother's constant care. No matter what the storm or stress of her professional life, no want of the little lad was too trifling for her attention. Pictures of the boy in every pose accompanied her on all her expeditions, and the fortune that had come so readily to her was doubly prized because of all it would mean in the future to her idolized only child.

Among the then circle of Melba's friends in Paris was Madame Bemberg, who had been a brilliant singer contemporary with Alboni, and for whose son, Herman, Gounod stood sponsor. Monsieur Bemberg early gave promise of unusual musical understanding, and the development of his artistic gifts was greatly encouraged by the Australian singer. Before the completion of his opera "Elaine" she sang over some of the music to him on different occasions—an experience which aroused him to the following expression of appreciation:

"Que je plains ceux qui n'ont pas eu la joie délicieuse d'être chanté par 'Elle.' Je ne me souviens

pas d'une émotion plus intense que cela que j'ai éprouvé en entendant soupirer de cette adorable voix ces premier mesures de l'aire 'd'Elaine.' J'ai cru rêver, et j'étais éveillé. Puisse la réalité ne pas s'envoler comme un rêve et me donner l'incomparable bonheur de voir créer 'Elaine' par l'artiste que je mets au-dessus de toutes—Nellie Melba.

"J. BEMBERG."

The opera was dedicated to Melba and Jean de Reszke, who created the two leading rôles on its production at Covent Garden on July 5. Melba entered into all the preliminaries with unusual zest. Jean de Reszke was equally enthusiastic, and the young composer was naturally envied and complimented on the good fortune that gave his work such distinguished exponents as these two singers and Marie Brema, Mathilde Bauermeister, Édouard de Reszke, and Pol Plançon. Melba and Jean de Reszke were repeatedly recalled after each act, and at the close of the Death Scene in the last act Melba had to come five times before the curtain, while the composer himself received two calls.

Monsieur Bemberg enjoys life more than most people, and is generally bubbling over with gaiety, which finds constant vent in his capacity for outlandish practical jokes. On the day of his first visit to Melba he took with him so magnificent an offering of flowers, and looked so very joyous, that her butler declined to admit the unfamiliar visitor. Bemberg, however, was determined, and eventually the butler announced him. Before entering the salon he held the elaborate bouquet well forward, and asked: "May I come?" In a few minutes Melba and he were talking and laughing like old friends. His merriment was

MELBA AS ELAINE

irresistible, and he was invited to stay to lunch. With the afternoon came other visitors, but Monsieur Bemberg's power to amuse his hostess and her friends never flagged, and it was only after dinner that he took his leave, the duration of his first call being a point which Melba is fond of telling against him.

Bemberg's opera was the only novelty with which she was associated that season, but her success in everything she sang was undeniable, and before the close of the summer term she was obliged to appear in two special extra performances of "Faust" and "Lohengrin." "Romeo and Juliet" was also given with great success, Melba's rôle, always vocally perfect, being now "histrionically exquisitely poetical."

After a rest at Aix during the month of August, followed by Continental engagements, Melba had her initial experience of an autumn season at Covent Garden, in which one of her important undertakings was her first appearance as Aïda, of which the *Daily Telegraph* said: "It is needless to say she sang well, for that she always does, but the feeling she threw into her work—feeling which sometimes reached abandonment to the passion of the minute—was a revelation of power not generally suspected. Both her singing and acting in the scene which ends with the arrest of Radames were fully equal to the demands of the music and the situation." By this time her improved work in "Lohengrin" had come to be the special delight of her admirers, and when she appeared in that opera during this supplementary season, the *Times* was able to say: "Madame Melba's reading of the part of Elsa is, of course, well known, and nothing that is not praise can be said of it; but a special word of praise must be given for her superb singing in the second act."

On November 23, 1892, she appeared as Desdemona in Verdi's "Otello," and while the earlier numbers won a new beauty from the girlish freshness of the voice, which makes her an ideal Juliet, the songs in the last act were made infinitely pathetic, even though the impersonation was not then among her dramatic successes. As she had had only four days' study of the part, it is not surprising that certain points were missed, or that her usually trustworthy memory should have failed her for a few bars in the ensemble of the third act.

She took a conspicuous share in the celebration of the professional jubilee of the famous Alboni. Numbers of distinguished men and women joined in felicitations to this great singer, who during so many seasons had enjoyed immense popularity in England; and the young Australian travelled from London to Paris specially in order to pay tribute to the veteran, who subsequently wrote:

"PARIS,
"*Décembre*, 1892.

"A MADAME MELBA.

"Je suis passé chez vous, ma chère Madame Melba, pour vous remercier d'avoir été si gracieusement aimable à l'occasion de mes 'noces d'or artistiques.' Cela ne me suffit pas, je tiens beaucoup à vous l'écrire: non seulement pour vous remercier, mais encore pour vous dire que vous avez été admirable comme chanteuse à roulade, et comme chanteuse dramatique; j'ai été parfaitement heureuse, ma chère Madame Melba, de vous entendre, et je tiens beaucoup à ce que vous le sacherez J'embrasse votre jolie figure.

"Votre affectionée ex-contralto,

"MARIE ZIEGER ALBONI."

CHAPTER XIII

"Il vostro canto e una ineffabile carezza."—GUETANO BRAGA.

IN 1893 Melba made a serious bid for the favour of the Italian public, and on March 16 of that year she sang at La Scala, Milan, for the first time, under conditions and results which have led to her often describing that performance as the most vividly remembered of her life. The traditions of the famous Opera-House have been exquisitely upheld for many years by the people of Milan, who, while proverbially generous to inexperienced musicians, have at times shown a certain reluctance to accept as pre-eminent any singer whose pre-eminence has not developed within Italy itself. Melba was in this unfortunate position: Brussels, London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Nice, Monte Carlo, had all accepted her as an incomparable singer before she came to Milan, so there were those in the music world of the city who determined to make light of the fame she had won in other lands. It happened that this, perhaps excusable, little semblance of resentment was encouraged into an unusual measure of antipathy by one or two jealous individuals, such as acquire a certain amount of influence in the art circles of every large city, who had singled out Melba for a merciless attack. A cabal was raised against her, and everything was done to place her in the worst possible

light before the public of Milan, where she then knew nobody on whom she could rely for encouragement and advice.

At all artistic haunts, where people usually well informed on musical matters were regularly to be met, it was freely stated that those who had heard Melba at rehearsal predicted that her début would be a sensational fiasco, so irretrievably bad, they said, were her voice and method. There were others who relied on the verdict of Paris, London, and St. Petersburg as a reasonable guide, and expressed their belief that these sinister rumours had their origin in a ridiculous intrigue; but on the whole the anticipations with regard to the new singer were the reverse of sympathetic. Patti had been there in January, the *première* of "Falstaff" had taken place in February, so that even under the most favourable circumstances the people were in a mood to disclaim the possibility of any further unusual enthusiasm that season.

Many of the musicians, who in the ordinary way might have been expected to pay their respects to a visiting singer of distinction, openly expressed their intention to wait until after Melba had been heard at the Opera, a conspicuous exception being chivalrous Arrigo Boito, composer and poet, who at the earliest possible moment called on Melba, and offered her the tribute of his admiration and esteem.

Men of high artistic position spoke assuredly of the failure awaiting Melba, and to such an extent was this almost farcical opposition exploited that the leading Venetian impresario urged her representative to abandon the La Scala season and repair to Venice, where everything was ready for the production of "I Rantzau." Much of the unpleasant gossip current

was for a time kept from the knowledge of the prima donna, but as a safeguard against any such happy ignorance of the animosity cleverly worked up by an interested clique, she was later bombarded with anonymous letters, in which all sorts of threats were made against her. In these missives Melba was notified that her food would be poisoned, that the lift would be tampered with; while the terrors of fire and water were also expatiated on as an extra reason for her seeking safety in flight from the city. Had it not been for the strong advice of her secretary, Melba would probably not have sung that season.

But she did sing—"Lucia di Lammermoor" was the opera—and made an easy conquest of the audience, which from boxes to gallery, as is customary at La Scala, was made up of those who in a special degree possess an intimate knowledge of the best musical traditions. When Melba, however, made her entrance in the first act, there were some people who in their affectation of just indifference continued their friendly conversation, and sat with their backs partly turned from the stage, so as to give to their neighbours the attention which the prima donna, according to rumour, did not merit. This attitude was of the briefest duration, and by the close of the first recitative the house was all attention. Always sensitive to the pulse of her audience, Melba soon felt that the hostility which had been conjured up against her had rapidly melted away, and as the evening progressed she knew that she was in complete rapport with the house. She had made her entry in an oppressive silence. At the close of the Mad Scene she was greeted by a wholly remarkable ovation. Cheers resounded from floor to ceiling, hats and hand-

kerchiefs were waved, almost every person in the building stood in the effort to make more emphatic the tribute of their appreciation, and the calls and recalls for the prima donna were kept up for half an hour. Melba was completely unnerved by the unexpected warmth of the demonstration. She had come upon the stage in an agony of doubt and suspense; she left it that evening a proud and happy victor. Never before had any audience been so generous to a stranger, and the chroniclers of the day pointed out that only once in living memory had a similar scene of enthusiasm been witnessed in an Italian theatre, and that was when Verdi himself appeared at the *première* of his opera "Falstaff," which Mascheroni conducted at La Scala on February 9 of that year.

The story of the wonderful success made by Melba at her Milan début quickly spread throughout Italy, and flattering engagements were pressed on her from every city in the country. The critics of the newspaper press wrote of her triumphs in terms of fervent appreciation, and on each successive appearance she was made to feel the growing ardour of the music-loving, warm-hearted Italians. Owing to the impression she had made, it was found impossible for her to leave Italy without visiting some of the other cities, and when the Milan season terminated she was starred at Florence, Turin, Genoa, where she sang under the most brilliant auspices, supported by some of the soloists, the chorus, and the orchestra of the historic La Scala Opera-House.

Monsieur Victor Maurel, who was among the audience on her first night at Milan, sent Melba the following interesting message:

A SOUVENIR OF FLORENCE

"A Madame Nellie Melba.

"La conquête d'un grand public par un artiste ressemble beaucoup à la prise de possession d'un pays les armes à la main. C'est presque toujours avec son sang et ses nerfs que l'on remporte de pareilles victoires. Plus heureuses que les simples mortels, les sirènes font exception à cette loi commune, et on peut leur attribuer la fameux 'Veni, vidi, vici.' C'est votre cas, chère amie, avec le public milanèse. Votre triomphe bien merité m'a procuré le grand plaisir de joindre mes applaudissements à ceux de tout le théâtre. Recevez en mes sincères félicitations, et croyez en votre admirateur,

"Victor Maurel."

Aldo Noseda, the critic of Italy's foremost journal, the *Corriere della Sera*, dealt with the occasion in the following manner: "It was a true and genuine success. Who expected it? No one, or almost no one. The public this year is not in an optimistic mood. To nibble now and then at a bit of soprano, to take a mouthful of tenor, is its regular function—in Lent almost a first necessity. The betting might have been ten to one that almost all the spectators went to La Scala last evening with a certain fear, mingled with ill-concealed flattery that they were about to offer on the holocaust of the diva Melba the complete annihilation of 'Lucia,' the said annihilation to terminate with the sanguinary sacrifice of the diva herself. When, at the end of the first act, the public realized that its gloomy expectations had melted away in the warm light of reality, it seemed as stupid as an elephant before a corkscrew. I must confess that with great equanimity it allowed its ears to be

well pulled before it changed this anything but benevolent mood with which it had entered the theatre, into vociferous and continuous applause.

"Madame Melba won a great battle yesterday. Many are the stars who have fallen on the stage of La Scala, and how much greater was the fame which preceded them, how much more were we led to expect from them! Yesterday evening's success counted as one of the most gratifying to the *amour propre* of an artist, and, let us frankly say, was flattering to the reputation of our public, who discerned, with the fine taste of a connoisseur, the exceptional qualities of the singer, who left little to be desired even as an actress.

"Amongst the useless things with which the so-called wisdom of a nation burdens itself by transmitting from one generation to another is the foolish aphorism, 'Comparisons are odious.' The devil they are; but how if the values should be relative, and everything not come up to the same standard? Well, then, the typical singer on whom we who write are forced to base our criterion of judgment, and therefore our comparisons, is Adelina Patti. She remains for us the most perfect exponent of the great art of singing. How many times last evening we told ourselves that for marvellous facility of production, for seduction of 'timbre,' for spontaneity of vocalization, for the finished art of modulation, for pureness of intonation, Madame Melba again renewed in us the intense enjoyment experienced so many years ago when listening to the diva Patti! Who else now, may we ask, can sing like Melba? It is true we have not, so far, seen her in strongly dramatic parts—not in the great rôles of the repertoire of new operas—neither as

A SOUVENIR OF MILAN

Elsa nor Isolde; but, then, who suggested that as yet she has her harp completely strung? Ah, but to bring close to our hearts' ears the magic of the inspired melodies of the old Italian masters—no one now interprets them as she can.

"We may add, that the facility and good taste with which she showed she could play with what to others would be stupendous difficulties—technique, perilous leaps, scales of the most perfect limpidity, the purest trills—gave to this somewhat out-of-date music a witchery and fascination entirely novel."

During this season Melba first made the acquaintance of the veteran Italian master Verdi, and was deeply impressed by his great personality. She found the wonderful old man simple and reserved to the verge of shyness, yet the briefest of interviews was sufficient to fix on the memory a lasting impression of his greatness. She was later honoured with his friendship, and with the utmost generosity he devoted a good deal of time to helping her in the study of "Rigoletto" and "Aïda," which latter has always been her favourite of his operas, in spite of her great admiration for "Otello," which she was once called on to sing in London after only four days' study.

It was in Milan also, during this year, that Melba came to know some of the subsequent leaders of the modern Italian school. A friend called on her one day when she was very tired from travel and her professional duties, and strongly urged her acceptance of an invitation to dinner. Owing to fatigue and the many calls on the little leisure she had, Melba demurred. Then her visitor broke into a long eulogy concerning a young composer, an absolute genius, he said, whom he was anxious to present to her, and who

was to be at the dinner where her presence was so anxiously looked for. Melba's unfailing interest in the affairs of her art made her speedily succumb to the latest phase of persuasion. She accepted the invitation. Always fond of studying faces, she paid particular attention to the features of the unknown composer, and before the dinner was over expressed herself as ready to find her friend justified in his estimate of the Italian's talents. Later on the composer played over his opera to Melba, and, writing on March 8, he said:

"A MADAME MELBA.

"Est-ce-que je pourrais avoir le bonheur inestimable d'entendre jamais par vous 'Stridono lassù liberamente'? Ce jour-là, s'il arrive, sera la réalisation d'un rêve, et j'entendrais dans ma musique ce que je n'y ai pas encore entendu. Votre admirateur dévoué,

"R. LEONCAVALLO."

Subsequently he asked if she would create the rôle of Nedda in London. Her reply was an emphatic affirmative, and Leoncavallo—for it was he—has often told of the incentive he received from the whole-hearted admiration which she then expressed for "Pagliacci," which was produced with brilliant success at Covent Garden the following year.

Her first meeting with Puccini, who was then becoming known through "Manon Lescaut," and whose wider fame was later on so largely helped by her zeal, also took place this season.

In April she made an operatic tour of Lyons, Marseilles, and the other large cities of France, wherein

she repeated her splendid impersonation of Ophélie before immense audiences that increased their enthusiasm at each successive appearance, until even the ardour of her Italian public seemed likely to be eclipsed. The acclaim of the people was reflected in the criticisms of the press, and every eulogistic phrase that poetic imagination could devise was employed in these public testimonials to her voice and art.

CHAPTER XIV

"Melba the sweet, the beautiful, the great."—MARIE BREMA.

THE opening of the London season of 1893 following so quickly on her triumphs in Italy and the French provinces insured an ardent welcome for Melba, who reappeared at Covent Garden on May 15 in "Lohengrin." Tremendously encouraged by the enthusiastic verdict of the Italian public, who had even exceeded the terms of laudation unreservedly lavished on her by the people of Brussels, Paris, St. Petersburg, Nice, and Monte Carlo, Melba began this season among her own race in a spirit of true emulation. One effect of the praise so liberally meted out to her abroad was a greater abandon in her acting, which some of the critics, however, now thought too dramatic.* More than one writer admonished her against any histrionic intensity that could lead to the ruffling of her glorious voice.

Four days after the performance of "Lohengrin," on her own birthday, Melba redeemed the promise she had given Leoncavallo in Italy, and created the rôle of Nedda in "Pagliacci" before a crowded audience, which greeted the first production with

* "There were moments last evening when her embodiment of the least dramatic of Wagner's heroines seemed a trifle too pronounced."—*Daily Telegraph.*

unbounded favour. Her singing and acting gave full effect to the composer's ideas as explained and demonstrated by him during her stay in Milan, and her success in the new rôle was one of the brightest features of the whole season. Every performance drew large and delighted audiences, and Leoncavallo by a single work reached a point of unique popularity.

"Faust" was another strong attraction throughout the opera term, particular significance being given to some of the performances by the appearance of Madame Marie Brema in the rôle of Siebel.

In response to the demand of the subscribers, "Romeo and Juliet" was staged on June 2 with the invariable result, and at the gala performance given at Covent Garden on July 4 by command of Queen Victoria, in honour of the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, Melba once again repeated her impersonation of Juliet with Messieurs Jean and Édouard de Reszke and Pol Plançon in the other leading parts. For this occasion the house was decorated in a most gorgeous manner, and an old-world note was struck by the contingent of Beef-eaters who were stationed in the crimson-lined corridors.

When "I Rantzau" was listed for production on July 7, Melba was once more a ready volunteer in the cause of modern Italian music, and sang the rôle of Luisa in Mascagni's work, which, however, did not entirely fulfil the promise of the young composer.

Late October and November of 1893 were set aside for a first tour in Sweden and Denmark, and in all the cities visited Melba met with instantaneous appreciation. She sang in "Romeo and Juliet' at the Opera-House, Stockholm, on October 31, and her other

impersonations were Elsa in "Lohengrin," Marguerite in "Faust," whilst on different occasions she gave the Mad Scene from "Hamlet" and the Mad Scene from "Lucia," both displays of vocalization arousing enormous enthusiasm among a people naturally prone to believe that no other singers could compare with their native nightingales, Jenny Lind and Christine Nilsson.

The distinguished critic of the *Dagens Nyheter*, in dealing with her first Swedish appearance in a Wagnerian rôle, said: "'Elsa, c'est mon idéal,' was Melba's answer when recently asked in Copenhagen which was her favourite rôle. Melba is Elsa; Melba, who by competent judges is said to have her greatest strength in pure *coloratura* parts, and whose voice might really be classed as soprano *légère;* Melba, whose dramatic talent does not yet exist, if we may take the word of the English critics. Well, as dramatic understanding does not reach very high in England, one can scarcely wonder, perhaps, if she did not trouble in that country. That, when she wishes, she can even in dramatic work satisfactorily render the most difficult parts, it has pleased her to show to our public. Everyone who sees her in Elsa is soon convinced that the famous singer is also a great actress. We scarcely believe that the representation outside the church, where Elsa with proud dignity reproaches the artful Ortrud, has ever before been so well acted in Stockholm. Throughout this great scene Madame Melba acted with such alert and subtle understanding, such admirably considered detail, that her impersonation would have honoured even an actress of rank who relied solely on her dramatic portrayal for her place in public esteem."

Near the close of the season the King of Sweden sent a message to Melba telling her that he had heard of her wonderful voice and art, and asking if she could await his return to the capital so that he might hear her. The date of her first appearance in America had already been announced, and everything was ready for her departure. On receipt of the King's request she cabled to America, and under the circumstances Mr. Grau agreed to give her an extra week's grace.

For the entertainment of His Majesty she sang the second act from "Lohengrin," the Balcony Scene from "Romeo and Juliet," the Mad Scene from "Lucia," and the last act of "Faust." He was delighted, and rose twice in his box and bowed to the prima donna. At the close of the performance he sent one of the officers of his suite to thank her and request her attendance at the palace the following morning. On arrival the King received her with many compliments, and then formally conferred on her the Order of Literature and Art. An amusing story, which has often been told, relates how King Oscar found himself without a pin to fasten the decoration on her breast, and in this emergency was obliged to borrow one from her. Then, remembering the ancient superstition, the gallant old ruler said, with a smile: "But this pin may cut our friendship unless I give you something in exchange." Leaning forward, he kissed Melba on both cheeks, adding: "Now we shall always be friends."

The King's acclaim but added further fire to the people's enthusiasm, and when Melba left Stockholm she was given such a send-off that ordinary traffic was stopped in the streets between her hotel and the railway-station. Her carriage was piled high with

flowers of every description, including a bouquet from the Crown Prince, now King, and as she approached the train she was serenaded by a chorus of 5,000 voices.

As foreigners are not allowed to appear on the stage of Denmark's only opera-house, Melba's performances in Copenhagen were confined to the concert-room. Gounod's "Ave Maria," "Caro Nome," and the Mad Scene from "Lucia," were among the numbers at her first concert on November 12. "The magnificence of the voice, the dazzling virtuosity and personal sonorousness of the organ, aroused the audience to a state of enthusiasm that increased quite alarmingly during the evening." At her second concert the hall was again crowded, and the prima donna, being then free from the nervousness natural to a first appearance, was able to do herself still greater justice. "There was the greatest possible fortissimo in the applause. Again and again she was called for, and in the Handelian air her magnificent voice and perfect art of singing were unfolded in the most admirable way." Extra concerts at Copenhagen were impossible, and from there she travelled to Havre *en route* for America.

Melba's tour in Scandinavia was saddened by the death of Gounod, which occurred at Paris on October 17, 1893, as she was leaving for the North. The composer of "Faust" had always regarded her as tenderly and as solicitously as though she had been his own daughter, and the breaking up of his home, where she had been wont to meet the great artists and savants of the day, lent an added keenness to her deep sense of personal loss.

CHAPTER XV

"Les plus mortelles blessures sont faites par les plus jolies mains."—CAROLUS DURAN.

MELBA'S first visit to America in 1893 was the climax to an eventful year, during which she had already added greatly to her rapidly rising fame by her success in France, Italy, England, Denmark, and Sweden. It was the year of the World's Fair at Chicago, during which efforts were made to secure the greatest attractions of the universe for exploitation in America, and the Australian singer was regarded as the vocal *pièce de résistance* of the day. Young, handsome, rich, famous, she had the world at her feet, and it was small wonder that she had the spirit to enter cheerily on undertakings which made exceptional demands on her mental and physical vigour. "Lucia di Lammermoor," "Semiramide," "Romeo and Juliet," were the first three operas in which she sang to the Western public, followed by "Tannhäuser," "Faust," "Hamlet," and "Pagliacci," which was staged for the first time in America on December 11, and which made no appeal to the public that season when any other singer impersonated Nedda. Owing to building operations, there had been no grand opera in New York the

season before, and this, together with an enormous influx of visitors, had provided a public eager and fresh for the Metropolitan enterprise.

The conditions attending her first appearance on December 4 were not wholly in her favour. The year had been one of most arduous artistic labours for her, involving wide and constant travel ; the passage from Havre to New York had been exceptionally boisterous, and, just as on the evening of her initial opera in Paris, one of the principals, Dufriche, was taken suddenly ill, and she had to act with an Enrico who had not rehearsed the part, and who had had no time for its reasonable preparation. Besides, she had selected " Lucia " for her début, and there were many who frankly proclaimed this choice injudicious. It was a Patti opera, they said. Madame Patti was at that very time making a tour of the United States, and for any new-comer to seek the favour of the American people in the rôle with which their idol of years past had been so intimately identified was accepted by many as testimony that the new singer would not be a success. There was nothing unusually encouraging in the manner of her reception. Several of the leading box occupants, who had already heard and met her in London and Paris, applauded her cordially ; but this evidence of favour from people who spent much of their time abroad, and who were suspected of foreign sympathies, did not favourably influence the general audience. The house as a whole did not show exceptional interest until the close of the Mad Scene, when there was much enthusiasm, and after which Plançon, Ancona, and other art comrades, cheered her with many compliments. Several criticisms of the following day were mildly favour-

able; others, and among them the most conservative, wholly enthusiastic.*

Some interested friends tried to explain the situation by showing that she had come a little too late, that Madame A. and Madame B., who had been there for the opening weeks, were the already established favourites. The Australian was not at all disconcerted because her first night had not been a sensational success, and she laughingly told her friends that "if it has been Madame A. and Madame B. at the beginning, it will certainly be Madame Melba at the end."

During the earlier weeks of the season efforts had been made to establish Sunday evening concerts, contributed to by the artists of the opera, but only the most meagre response had been accorded to the venture. Melba was persuaded to give her support to the failing scheme, and one month after her début her voice, her art, and her personality were able to turn these concerts into a remarkable success, whereat began the unusual demonstrations of popular approval which it has ever since been her good fortune to receive in increasing measure from the American public. In any comparisons that were made, she was never likened to any lesser artists than Patti and Nilsson, and tributes were paid to the warm and beautiful quality of her voice and the perfection of

* "The temptation is strong to say that in vocal equipment pure and simple she surpasses all her rivals. In finish of vocalization she is the finest example heard on the local stage since Sembrich made her début here ten years ago. Her voice is charmingly fresh and exquisitely beautiful, and the tone production is more natural and more spontaneous than that of the marvellous woman [Patti] who so long upheld the standard of the *bel canto* throughout the world."—*New York Tribune*, December 5, 1893.

her vocalization which have never been excelled in the criticisms of any singer. The people evinced the keenest interest in her personality, and were puzzled yet charmed by the reserve which never wholly deserts her even in moments of gay and familiar intercourse. In the sad expression of her face, doubly marked in time of repose, they read the evidence of sorrow's discipline, and sympathetic wonder was added to their attitude of admiration and regard.

She was undoubtedly greatly helped in her American conquest by her personal appearance, so admirably summarized by Jacques Isnardon in his "History of the Théâtre de la Monnaie": "An English beauty. The nose is straight, long, and delicate; the neck is exquisite, superbly set; the eye disdains largeness—it wonders, it searches; the mouth is frank and loving. The build of head, neck, and shoulders reveals clearly the thoroughbred. On the stage this ensemble is poetized. Her ideal profile harmonizes with the charm of her carriage." The smallness and beautiful shape of her ears, hands, and feet are additional points that appealed to her new world of admirers, who also went into raptures over her soft-speaking voice and musical laugh.

A peculiar attraction of Melba's face lies in the unusually delicate eyelids and long curling lashes which shade her strangely coloured red-brown eyes. Although of little more than the average woman's height, she carries herself with such grace of bearing that even among tall people she appears to be of rather exceptional stature.

The production of "Tannhäuser" in French on January 29, 1894, with Melba in the rôle of Elizabeth, was her first introduction to the American

Photo Davis & Sanford, New York

MELBA AS "ELIZABETH" IN "TANNHAUSER"

public in the music of Wagner, and the Metropolitan Opera-House was filled with an eager and sympathetic audience. Mancinelli conducted the performance, in which Signor Vignas was Tannhäuser, and Signor Ancona, Wolfram. In discussing the production, the *New York Tribune* alluded to "the marvellous talents of Melba, who can uninterruptedly display the most perfect of musical instincts," and paid a warm tribute to the art of Plançon, who was also in the cast. After taking some exception to different points, and to the appearance of lyric artists in Wagnerian rôles, the same journal continued: "Melba made superb use of the wealth of voice with which Nature has endowed her. Its power and ringing timbre, together with the perfect utterance which is hers, made her Elizabeth singularly effective." The general verdict was one of warm favour, and the audience encouraged Melba with unstinted applause.

In the conservative columns of the *New York Sun*, Mr. W. J. Henderson, the eminent critic, wrote that "Melba's treatment of the scene with Tannhäuser in the second act was so beautiful in the finish of its declamation, and so just in its intent, that it amazed the soprano's friends, and put her enemies, if she ever had any, to confusion."

A week later, when "Lohengrin" was staged at the Metropolitan (February 6, 1894), the Italian text was again adhered to, and in support of Melba as Elsa there were Signor Vignas as Lohengrin, Signor Ancona as Telramund, and Monsieur Édouard de Reszke as the King. As was to be expected in the initial performance, there were different points of dramatic immaturity in her representation, which was "musically rich in the same excellences as her

Elizabeth. The astonishing sustaining power of her voice and the reposefulness of her singing rested like a benediction on every moment of her performance."* In summarizing the details, the same critic said that the magnificence of her wardrobe was without a parallel as far as the local stage is concerned. The *New York Herald* critic wrote: "Incomparably the most attractive thing she has done since her advent. Such passages as 'Einsam in trueben Tagen' and 'Euch Lueften' were never more beautifully phrased. In the third act she surprised me by such depth of feeling and faculty of surrendering herself to the dramatic situation with so much abandon and such nicely concealed art. The manner in which she sank to the ground, as well as her attitude of utter despair, after Lohengrin had slain the murderous intruder, were most beautifully conceived and carried out."

The official New York season closed with a performance of "Faust" on February 23, 1894, when the Metropolitan was packed to the doors, and so many people were unable to obtain admission that the management felt justified in arranging a supplementary term to be resumed after the company had returned from the other cities for which they had been booked. On this production of Gounod's work Melba sang Marguerite for the first time in New York, and made an instantaneous success in the part. The Faust and Mephistopheles of the evening were the superb artists Jean and Edouard de Reszke. In every respect it was an occasion of triumph for Melba, who by her singing, acting, and bearing literally took the audience off their feet, and received again and

* *New York Tribune.*

again the tribute of frenzied applause. "Since Nilsson there has been no Marguerite the equal of Melba's. It was incomparably the most remarkable performance given here this season. Such purity of tone, amplitude of volume, such breadth of style, came as a genuine revelation."* At the close of the opera she was greeted with a tempest of enthusiasm, renewed until finally the two de Reszkes pushed a piano on the stage, and she sang "Home, Sweet Home," to the accompaniment of the great Polish tenor.

In Chicago, for the moment the world's capital, Melba won an unparalleled success. Here again she chose "Lucia" for her first appearance. The *Herald*, after commenting on her voice and method, said: "Madame Melba, who has achieved a triumph which may well be regarded as an historic episode, with which comparisons will inevitably be made for many years to come, is a prepossessing and queenly woman, whose unaffected manner and simplicity of style commend her at once to the good graces of an audience. A handsome and expressive face, graceful carriage, and an apt, though by no means pretentious, dramatic instinct, still further commend her to attention and admiration. It is the voice, however, that fully completes these engaging endowments, a voice which places her above any other soprano known to the operatic stage at the present time. It is idle even, through fear of appearing over-enthusiastic, to deny the self-evident fact of her commanding superiority. There is but one voice belonging to the generation with which Melba's may properly be compared, and that is the voice of Patti as it was known to us and

* *New York Herald.*

admired a dozen years ago, when in the full glory of its prime. It exhibits the same faultless timbre, the same purity and smoothness throughout a wide range, the same electric quality, the same elasticity and flexibility, the same richness and colour. And yet there is a tinge of added warmth to give it individuality. Her faculty of execution is a marvel. The stage has seldom known a finer example of tone production, or a voice more persuasive and enchanting. Such a triumph so magnificently rounded out and complete is almost without a parallel in the history of our stage." Other journals wrote in even more glowing terms, and so exceptional was the impression she created that even the most conservative of critics seemed to abandon the usual reserve of their craft, and heaped upon her encomiums couched in terms of unprecedented appreciation.

In "Semiramide," wherein Melba had the support of Madame Scalchi and Monsieur Edouard de Reszke, and in which she had already captivated New York, she but confirmed the opinion expressed on the opening night, and the *Record* described her as "the greatest artist of the time." By the day of her third appearance, which was in "Romeo and Juliet," the whole city was ringing with praises of the new "star"; and although this production took place on Holy Thursday, a day on which numbers of Americans absent themselves from public amusements, the auditorium was thronged by a vast assemblage. The cast for Gounod's opera included Jean and Édouard de Reszke. The applause on her exit from the balcony was so demonstrative that Monsieur Jean de Reszke's succeeding number was twice interrupted ere the uproar could be quelled.

The enthusiastic attitude of the critics and general public in Chicago had a most stimulating effect on Melba's work, and, sensitively responding to every fresh phase of encouragement, she regularly enhanced her place in popular esteem. Every succeeding performance saw a broadening of her dramatic reading, an additional subtle touch in her vocal expression. Of her warm-hearted interest in the work of her colleagues, major and minor, she had already given many illuminating instances. During a performance of "Tannhäuser," Signor Vignas, finding himself suddenly out of voice, was obliged to omit some of the music, a course which greatly disappointed the audience, and audiences under these circumstances are nearly always prone to think the singer might have tried, any way. To allay any possible irritation against the indisposed tenor, Melba volunteered to sing an extra number at the close of the Wagnerian work. This gave the manager an opportunity to fully explain Signor Vignas's regrets and disappointment, and put the audience in thoroughly good humour. At the close of the extra number Melba received an ovation, the equal of which, in genuine spontaneity, has rarely been accorded to a singer.

This particular performance of "Tannhäuser" was said to be the "banner night" of the season, and, following as it did so much florid work on her part, Melba's performance came as a complete surprise. As evidence of the attention she devoted to the details of this performance, it may be mentioned that she expended a sum of £500 on the dress worn in the second act, where the text demands an appearance of regal magnificence.

During this season Melba had a narrow escape from

serious accident while on a visit to Philadelphia, an escape which is well described in her own words: "I was singing Gilda in 'Rigoletto,' at the point where she passes up the high stairway, along a balcony, and enters a door, singing as she goes, and finishing the scene with a long trill after having passed out of sight of the audience. As I walked into the dark through the door, which was high above the stage, I started forward, as I was always accustomed to do. One step more, and I should have fallen from the height to the stage below, for only a narrow platform without a railing had been put there; but I stopped myself in time, and fell backward against the scene. That trill was never finished."

For her introduction to Boston, Melba's selection fell on the opera of "Romeo and Juliet," in which Monsieur Jean de Reszke, who had already made a great success there two years before as young Montague, and Monsieur Pol Plançon as the friar, added greatly to the interest of the revival. In the centre of American culture the Australian singer's success was instantaneous and unusual. "It was generally conceded that no such singing had ever been heard in Boston." To quote the leading criticisms would be to give a succession of extraordinary appreciations, in which the *Herald* struck the keynote in saying: "Such scenes of enthusiasm as those which were called out by her efforts have seldom been witnessed in this city, and the sights and sounds throughout the hall after her numbers gave the artist ample cause for pride in her triumph over the conservative public of Boston."

While staying in Boston there happened a little incident which has been told many times. Staying in

the same hotel was a lady with a sick child, and one day, when Melba was running through some exercises, the invalid stopped to listen, and called in delight: "Hist, mother, birdie!" The lady told the prima donna of the child's comment, and Melba returned the compliment by visiting the sick-room, and singing several numbers to the little sufferer, whose "bird" his tender imagination soon transformed into an angel.

An unusual finale to the regular opera term was the trial of the supplementary season in New York, on the return of the company from their visits to the cities named. "Lohengrin" was again billed at the Metropolitan Opera-House, with Melba and Jean de Reszke in the cast, but owing to the extraordinary incident of the three singers suited for the rôle of Ortrud—Mesdames Fursch-Madi, Domenech, and Guercia—all being stricken with colds, the opera had to be altered to "Semiramide," in which Melba, Scalchi, and Édouard de Reszke enhanced the music by their splendid interpretation. The final Sunday night concert, which series Melba had vitalized into success, was turned into a testimony of public favour for her. On April 26, for the last time that season, she appeared in the opera of "Lucia," in which she had made her début in America five months earlier under conditions not altogether inspiring. What a change in that brief period!

"When the finale of the opera was reached the house burst into a tumult of cries of 'Melba!' who, as was evident when she finally appeared, had been changing out of her stage dress. The audience became so impatient that she was forced to come forward in a wrapper that she had evidently seized

hurriedly. She was received with shouts of 'Bravo!' and 'Speech!' There was no speech, but the standing, cheering audience kept up the demand until, to silence them, she consented to sing once more. The curtain was raised, a piano wheeled upon the stage, and she sang 'Home, Sweet Home.' There was wonderful feeling in it. The house was completely hushed, and as she left the stage those in the audience said to each other: 'Melba is crying.' And they were right."*

On the following evening, when the season concluded with a polyglot programme, in which the whole splendid array of artists, including Mesdames Nordica, Calvé, Scalchi, Eames, Arnoldson, Bauermeister, and Messieurs Jean and Édouard de Reszke, Lassalle, de Lucia, Vignas, and Carbone, took part, Melba had an experience of public favour that thrilled her heart. The Mad Scene from "Hamlet" was her selection, and when she appeared for it a "great irrepressible cheer rang through the house, and it seemed several minutes before she could begin singing." After accepting many single recalls, Mr. Maurice Grau led her in front of the curtain, then Mr. Henry Abbey drew her before the audience, and finally both managers appeared with the new favourite. The applause for the trio was remarkable. Even then the audience could not be induced to leave, and the scene of the previous evening had to be repeated, Melba again singing "Home, Sweet Home."

Even then the measure of her personal and artistic success was not complete, for she was followed to the Savoy Hotel by the Metropolitan Opera-House orchestra and large numbers of the box-holders and other subscribers, and was the recipient of the

* *New York Herald.*

further compliment of a serenade. The orchestra found accommodation in the main lobby of the hotel, and gathered round them were representatives of many of the musical institutions and leading private families. When Melba appeared on the balcony overlooking the lobby, the gathering cheered to the echo. She invited the whole company to sup with her in the dining-room of the hotel, and the toasting of the prima donna was the closing compliment of her first American season. Her success was complete in every way; she was the prime favourite of the public, the strongest financial card of the management, and never had any prophecy been so thoroughly established as her own half-humorous, quietly confident assertion, made as an indifferently received stranger, that, no matter who was favourite at the beginning of the season, she would be favourite at the end. Lahee, in his book "Grand Opera in America," when dealing with this season, pays a notable tribute to Melba, who during one visit "acquired popularity almost equal to that of Patti in her best days."

CHAPTER XVI

"Vous n'êtes qu'une merveille."—C. Coquelin.

It would be idle to deny that Melba's conquest of America during the early half of 1894 was not without effect in the corresponding sphere of England, where her hold on the public made steady advance. For the first time in the history of music an artist of British birth and parentage was the reigning operatic queen, and accepted unhesitatingly as such in centres where she had to contend with the bogie of local prejudice. The fact of her being British was in a certain measure a barrier to her acceptance as a singer of first rank, even among her own people, but in the largesse of her own cosmopolitanism she never gave a thought to the provincialism of others.

During May she began her second season at La Scala, and received a flattering welcome. Signor Omero Guaita, one of the most severe of the musical connoisseurs of Milan, never missed a single Melba performance during these two seasons, and subsequently said: "She reminds me more than any other artist who has sung at the Scala, of Malibran and Pasta, and I think these are the only two singers with whom she should be compared. Like them, she can bring the whole audience to their feet in a storm of applause." Even the little boys in the street used

to shout "Eccola la Melba!" when she passed, and to know her, or have some kind of association with her, came to be accepted as a social passport of interest. It is not unusual to-day, when visitors are taken over La Scala, for them to be shown "the room where the celebrated Melba used to dress."

"Faust" was the opera in which she made her bow at Covent Garden in 1894, and the few who had been at Antwerp half a dozen years before, when she essayed the character for the first time in her life, and who saw and heard her go through the rôle of Marguerite that season in London, were impressed by her marked progress. Her greater intensity of expression and larger dramatic feeling were as patent as the enhanced power of the lower register of her voice. She had seen, thought, and felt for herself. The *Saturday Review* marked her coming thus: "To say that Madame Melba's is the most beautiful voice of the day, and at the service of an unsurpassed technique, is to say little; and what makes Madame Melba the queen of the lyric stage now is her irreproachable style of singing, the *accento* in her delivery, her fine dramatic instinct, and the talent for taking infinite pains over the interpretation of a part. What fills even experts with wonder is the prodigious spontaneity of her vocalization, a preciously unique quality. Her Marguerite is perfection." Connoisseurs of all shades of opinion were unanimous as to the beauty of her voice.

During the season she repeated with conspicuous success her interpretation of Elsa to the Lohengrin of Jean de Reszke, and "Romeo and Juliet" with these two singers in the title-rôles proved another irresistible attraction. They were also heard in a

revised version of Herman Bemberg's "Elaine," but even in the new edition the weakness of the libretto seriously handicapped the value of the music, although given by two such ideal exponents. In the new production there was still less scope for the beauties of Melba's voice than in the original score, but the prima donna who had volunteered to sing such parts as Micaela, the Queen in "The Huguenots," and other modest rôles, was not the one to let such a circumstance prevent her giving enthusiastic co-operation in a production which she conceived to be of general worth. Bemberg, she has often since said, would have become a great composer, one of the greatest, had his ambition not been clogged by a large private fortune.

In the middle of the season Melba sang for the first time at the Handel Festival in the Crystal Palace, the carrying power of her voice being demonstrated in an exceptional way by the manner in which it rang through the vast building during her delivery of "Let the Bright Seraphim" and the air from "L'Allegro ed il Pensieroso." Her Festival début was a success, but the Crystal Palace was not built for singing in, and she quickly recognized its disadvantages. When her share in the day's programme was finished, she announced her determination never to sing there again, and there is no likelihood of her departing from that resolve.

CHAPTER XVII

"In ricordo della nostra buona conoscenza e della nostra eccellente Semiramide—alla brava e cara Melba."—SOPHIE SCALCHI.

"THE future can have no pleasanter souvenirs for me than those I take away from America, and if I do not return, believe me it will be no fault of mine," had been the message of farewell spoken by Melba at the close of her first visit to America. For the next season (1894-95) she made an early entry, and was the chief attraction at a number of concerts given by Mr. Henry Abbey before the opening of the opera session at the Metropolitan, where on November 19 she and Jean de Reszke, with Édouard de Reszke and Pol Plançon, were associated in a great performance of "Romeo and Juliet" under the direction of Mancinelli. Although in England the greatest artists of the company rarely appear till the season is well advanced, to be the prima donna of the initial and final performances of the season is the privilege of the accepted star in America, and Melba was at once conceded these rights of operatic sovereignty. In the revival of "Lucia di Lammermoor," once again staged for her benefit, she had the invaluable support of Tamagno as Edgardo.

The American people were quick to notice and

appreciate Melba's avoidance of what are generally described as "prima donna airs." Even in the concerts, where she was volunteered absolute supremacy, she never sought for any treatment more favourable than that accorded her least famous colleagues. She took her place on the programme wherever the balance of its composition demanded it; she insisted on her name being printed just the same size as the others; when she made her entrance, either on the platform or stage, there was no rustling at the side, no significant wait, no pause in the orchestra, no trickery of a few notes by fife or drum to draw special attention to her coming. She allowed nothing to be done to direct towards herself any of the attention that should be given to her work. Away from the concert-room and opera-house there was the same avoidance of bizarre affectations and eccentric mannerisms; in private life she was as reasonable and unostentatious as in her professional affairs. Here was a revelation.

In this woman with the patrician face, the indefinable reserve, whose mode of life is necessarily cast on lines of considerable luxury, the democratic American people made a new discovery—a prima donna who discarded all affectations of exoticism, and put herself forward as an ordinary rational being.

The surprise and pleasure which Melba had already caused in this way was greatly augmented when it was announced that she would again undertake the rôle of Micaela in a revival of "Carmen," with Zélie de Lussan and Jean and Édouard de Reszke in the leading parts. Between her operatic engagements she made concert appearances at Washington, Boston, Buffalo, Providence, and New Haven, and at the latter place she was given the extra compli-

ment of a serenade by the students of Yale, who at the close of the performance proceeded to her hotel, and sang beneath her window until the night was far advanced. In Baltimore, where she went for the opening of the New Music Hall, and where she began her long and happy association with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, she was received with no less fervour.

During this year's visit to Chicago, Melba had a narrow escape from a sensational experience. When visiting that city, she always occupied the same suite in the Auditorium Hotel, and these rooms were known on the register by her name. On this occasion, owing to some combination of circumstances, the Melba suite was not available for the singer, as it had been found impossible to arrange satisfactorily for the transference of the previously installed occupant. An hour or two after the time at which it was known the prima donna had arrived in the city, two well-dressed men of gentlemanly appearance presented themselves at the "Melba suite," and on their knock being answered by the lady in occupation, one quickly pushed his way into the room, while the other covered her with a revolver. Under these circumstances they made a peremptory demand for the delivery of her jewels. The astonished lady explained that she had none; they swore that she had, and finding that she would not hand them over, they gagged and bound her and made a complete search. Failing to find the expected booty, they locked the doors and made a careful exit. Some hours later, when a chambermaid entered, she found the lady in a state of exhaustion. Although Melba on that particular visit had taken few jewels with her, the papers had told many

stories about her amazing collection of diamonds, and it was for these the daring thieves had planned the hold-up in the "Melba suite." When the diva heard of the terrifying experience which the lady had been subjected to through being mistaken for her, she paid her a visit of sympathy.

On December 17, Herman Bemberg's opera "Elaine" was staged for the first time in America, the cast including Melba, the two de Reszkes, and Pol Plançon. Mancinelli was in the conductor's chair, and the mounting of the work was admirable. Opinions were divided as to the complete merit of the composition, which, however, the house received warmly, and which the *Sun* and other leading papers hailed as an instant "hit" fully worthy of a place in the regular répertoire. Monsieur Bemberg's personal success was considerable, and at concerts and private parties he often played Melba's accompaniments to his own songs, the combination making a decided attraction.

The splendour of the cast of "The Huguenots," which was given on December 26, was really remarkable, and specially interesting through Melba electing to fill the small part of the Queen. The complete cast was as follows:

Valentina - - - -	MADAME NORDICA.
Urbano - - - -	MADAME SCALCHI.
Margherita - - - -	MADAME MELBA.
Raoul - - - -	JEAN DE RESZKE.
Marcello - - - -	EDOUARD DE RESZKE.
San Bris - - - -	POL PLANÇON.
Di Nevers - - - -	VICTOR MAUREL.

Such a combination of artists afforded a great musical treat, and in giving all their measure of praise Reginald de Koven said: "Place aux dames.

Madame Melba, who was heard for the first time as the Queen, was fairly dazzling in appearance, and acted with much grace and spirit, while her vocalization was like some fabric of richest lace—so delicate, so dainty, so fairy-like and finished was it. Verily, this usually secondary part was glorified and made much of last night." It is worth pointing out that, although the night's expenses in connection with this production cost over £2,000, the management made a profit of over £800.

"Tannhäuser," with Melba as Elizabeth and Jean de Reszke in the name-part; "Lakmé," in which she sang the title-rôle; "Otello," with Tamagno as the Moor, Maurel as Iago, and Melba as Desdemona; and "Lohengrin," with the Australian soprano and Jean de Reszke in the chief characters, were among the other great achievements of this season.

When "Semiramide" was given on January 25, 1895, there were many who said that the presence of Melba was the only possible excuse for its revival; but the claims of Scalchi, whose Arsace was one of her finest impersonations, must be held to have also influenced the management, for in the duets between these two singers the opera-going public were provided with an unusual delight. "In 'Semiramide' she effaced the memory of her great predecessor (Patti) from the minds of her hearers by a much broader and more artistic, and decidedly less personal and conscious, rendering. Her performance was graceful and earnest, and she displayed intensely musical sensitiveness and that intelligence of phrasing which makes her the wonderful artist she is."*

Philadelphia, which was also visited that season,

* *The Sun.*

has long since become a Melba stronghold—a city, like Boston, crowded with friends and admirers, where she may make a succession of visits during any season, always sure of overflowing houses. During this second season's visit to the Quaker city, Melba, on approaching her carriage one bitter winter night when the snow lay deep on the ground, was accosted by a poor old woman of refined appearance, who had waited outside the Academy of Music for some time. "Won't you shake hands with me?" asked the woman, who was said to be a one-time successful singer; "won't you give me a rose? I have waited all the evening just to see your face." In an irresistible impulse Melba pressed all the lovely flowers she was carrying into the arms of the poor sentinel, and, bending forward, kissed her thin white face. In a moment the stranger recovered herself, and, stepping close to the carriage, whispered through her tears: "God bless your beautiful heart"—words which formed the title of some pathetic little verses embodying the incident, which have become well known in America.

"It will amuse you to know I have never before sung a song in German at any of my concerts," said Melba in reply to a warm compliment on her singing of "Still wie die Nacht" at Baltimore. "I have lately been studying German, and hope one of these days to address you in that tongue. My linguistic répertoire now only includes three 'Sprachen,' as the Germans say—English, French, and Italian. But my limited knowledge of German does not interfere with my study of Wagner, whom I love, and in whose 'Lohengrin' and 'Tannhäuser' I have already appeared in this country."

From early October 1894, to early May 1895, Melba remained in America, but even this exceptionally long season of seven months, which was entirely confined to the Eastern States, was not long enough to minimize her popularity. The New York opera season closed on May 4 with a performance made up of selections from the most successful productions, in which all the great singers took part. On the stage there was the usual "last night" excitement, and every artist except Melba had visitors behind the scenes. Eager to be left unmolested in her own work, she has always been careful to save the stage hands from the hindrance or embarrassment which is caused to some extent by strangers passing to and fro.

She had sung on the first night of the season, and for the closing night she was set down to give the final number. The chorus, with whom she always contrives to be a supreme favourite, watched anxiously for her, and there were many others to gaze at her as she threaded her way towards the stage. In passing, she said aloud: "Ma foi! all the world has friends here save me." Describing this scene, Rudolph E. Block said: "In a few moments she was singing the Mad Scene from 'Lucia di Lammermoor.' Melba was singing; so Tamagno, who had been humming the sonorous lines of 'Aïda,' stopped short in his tragic strides, and, with folded arms, listened. Jean de Reszke, all prepared to leave the stage, raised his hand to entreat perfect silence among his companions, and listened. Nordica, with downcast eyes, stood in the wings pensive and listening. When it was all over, the audience thundered with applause and deluged Melba with flowers. There she stood bowing

to left and right, glowing with triumph, radiant in the glory of the moment, while the crowd yelled itself hoarse. Yet Melba knows not what her triumph was that night. Proud and happy and smiling, pale with gratified ambition, Melba knew not at that moment how high she had risen. Far from that tumultuous crowd a little chorus girl stood crouched in a distant corner of the stage, crying as if her heart would break. That was Melba's triumph."

For any artist, after the brief acquaintance of two seasons, to have won such generous recognition as that given to Melba by the American people was unprecedented, and the *New York Globe*, in commenting on the matter in a leading article, said : " The Melba rage which has possessed New York will always be remembered as one of the most extraordinary manifestations of enthusiasm for art. It is doubtful whether demonstrations of equal intensity have ever before been witnessed in the metropolis. This is, of course, saying a vast deal, when one remembers the passionate applause accorded to popular favourites like Patti, Paderewski, and Emma Eames."

CHAPTER XVIII

"A Nellie Melba. Comme une ange vous chantez avec votre voix divine."—EMME CALVÉ.

"FAUST" was staged for Melba's opening night at Covent Garden in 1895, the house that welcomed her being one of the now customary brilliancy. So numerous had grown her circle of enthusiastic supporters that the quantities of flowers sent to the Opera for her acceptance became somewhat of an interference with the ordinary routine of the house, and not long afterwards it was decided to suspend entirely the custom of passing floral tributes over the footlights. She had already made it a regular practice, when acknowledging the applause of the audience, to come before the curtain with the other members of the company, instead of appearing alone, as had been the closely reserved privilege of other prima donnas.

For an orchestral concert in the Queen's Hall at the height of the season, Melba appeared with the distinguished conductor Arthur Nikisch, whose direction secured beautiful completeness in her own numbers—among them "Sweet Bird" and the Mad Scene from "Hamlet," which aroused a truly remarkable ovation, in which the Crown Prince and Princess of Roumania and the Grand Duke and Duchess of Hesse joined with conspicuous enthusiasm. Many

lovely floral offerings were placed at the feet of the diva that day, the most unique being a tall tripod from the centre of which depended a pretty brazen cage containing a canary, which broke into song just as it was being carried from the platform.

"Otello," with Melba as Desdemona, was next announced, but she was unable to appear. On June 22, before the Crown Prince and Princess of Roumania and the Grand Duchess of Hesse, "Romeo and Juliet" was repeated with the usual results. When "The Huguenots" was performed on June 29, the splendid cast included Albani, Giulia Ravogli, Tamagno, Plançon, Arimondi, Ancona, and Melba, who undertook the part of Margherita de Valois.

In the scene where the Queen sits on the throne and engages in conversation with the ladies of the Court, the topic brought up on one occasion proved so engrossing that Melba forgot her cue, and even the ever-ready Mademoiselle Bauermeister was unable to supply it. In this predicament the Australian prima donna substituted for the Meyerbeer passage some impromptu phrases of her own, ending with a brilliant cadenza. Monsieur Plançon, as St. Bris, was due to continue after the original phrases, "Madame, I will go and bring my daughter," but, noticing Melba's lapse, he sang instead, "Madame, I will go and tell Meyerbeer," whereat Mancinelli, who had, of course, noticed Melba's impromptu addition to the music, had to bury his face in the score in order to hide his amusement at Plançon's sally.

When Calvé assumed her famous rôle of "Carmen" in July, before a delighted audience which included the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and the Crown Princess Stéphanie of Austria, Micaela was undertaken by

Melba "out of courtesy to the management," as was set forth in all the public announcements. Monsieur Alvarez was the Don José. Of Calvé's Carmen Melba has often said: "It will be known in the history of music as an incomparable performance."

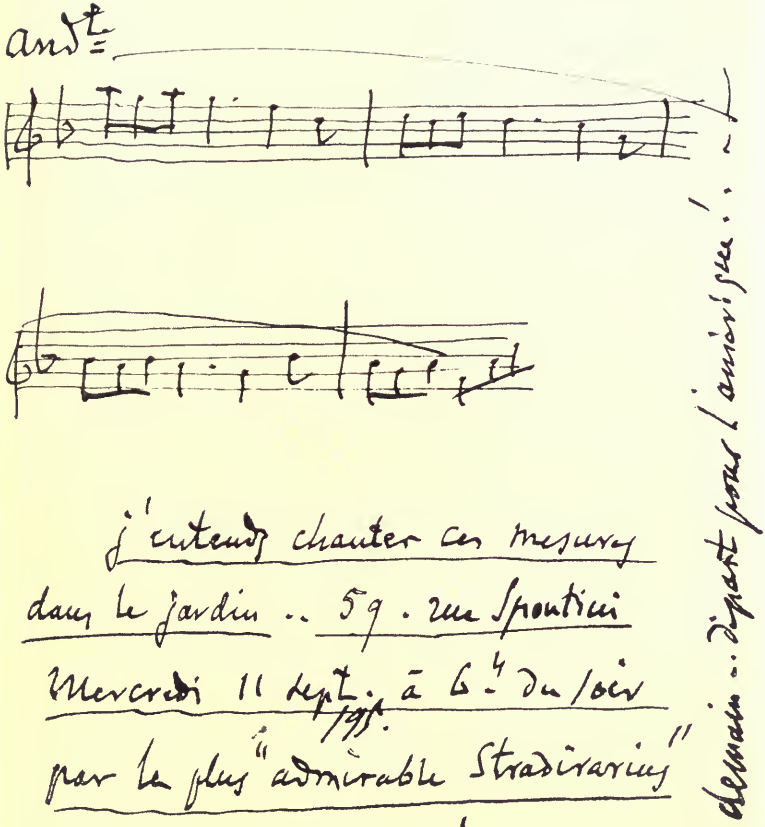
During the summer of 1895 she prepared Massenet's "Manon Lescaut," under the direction of the composer. While visiting a friend, Melba went into the garden one afternoon, and as she wandered among the flowers sang over the music of her rôle. Quite unexpectedly Massenet called, and hearing the singer, who, unconscious of his presence, still went on, he said to the hostess, "I hear in it now something I had hitherto not dared to hope for," and he left for Melba an interesting little note.

As a Christmas greeting (1895) to her secretary, Miss Louie Bennett, Melba decided to send to England for that young lady's fiancé, Mr. Kenyon Mason, and under her protection they were married at the Archbishop's house, adjoining St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, by Archbishop Corrigan, on January 14, 1896. The *déjeuner* which she subsequently gave at the Savoy Hotel in honour of the occasion brought together an unusual combination of artists, including Nordica, Calvé, Jean and Edouard de Reszke, Plançon, Maurel, Cremonini, Bevignani, Ancona, and Adamowski. Melba entered the banquet-hall on the arm of the Archbishop, and a more stately pair it would be difficult to imagine. It might be suspected that the selection of her gown for that day had been made with an extra thought as to the colour possibilities of the occasion, for her delicate mauve toilette was in happiest harmony with the purple on Dr. Corrigan's clerical attire. She inter-

ested herself in the whole matter as though it were the supreme event of her own life, and in addition to the more practical evidence of her friendship for the young secretary, who was also a native of Melbourne, she personally superintended all the details, and designed the souvenir menu-cards, which were described as the prettiest ever seen in New York. Melba delighted the Archbishop by offering to sing for him at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the crowd that gathered in and around the beautiful building on the day she redeemed her promise was one of the greatest ever known in that block of Fifth Avenue. The personality of this notable ecclesiastic appealed strongly to Melba, and from that time until his death he was her friend and confidant.

On the evening of the wedding she sang at Brooklyn, and the drive across provided an exciting little incident. In her carriage was an old-fashioned iron foot-warmer, which, owing to some defect, set fire to her fur cloak. Divesting herself of the burning garment, she stepped out into the snow while matters were remedied, and when she appeared before the public a little later there was nothing in voice or manner to indicate the unusual exertions of the day, nor the fact that her beautiful wrap had been destroyed.

This season was one of great interest for Melba, who was accompanied by her sister Annie and her brother Ernest, both accomplished amateurs of music. They were the recipients of many social attentions, and were specially impressed by the remarkable enthusiasm aroused by their distinguished sister when she sang in Massenet's "Manon Lescaut" for the first time in New York, on



FACSIMILE MESSAGE FROM JULES MASSENET

January 27, 1896, at the Metropolitan Opera-House. The performance went admirably in every way, and the singer was as gratified as the great audience which acclaimed her latest success. Madame Sarah Bernhardt was in New York at the time, and the day following Massenet's opera Melba went to see the French tragédienne in "Adrienne Lecouvreur," and was quite unnerved by the reality of the French artist's acting in the closing scenes. Operas that followed in quick succession included "Carmen," with Calvé, Jean de Reszke, and Melba in the leading parts; this trio at the performance on February 3, eliciting so many recalls that they laughingly confessed their inability "to drag their feet on any more."

The news of Ambroise Thomas's death at Paris on February 12 reached New York the following day, and shed quite a gloom over the French artists of the opera. Melba, who had enjoyed his close friendship since her student days, was particularly depressed, and felt that one of the strongest ties that bound her to Paris had now been sadly severed.

"The Huguenots," with the great cast to which the New York people had now become accustomed since Melba's first appearance there as Margherita de Valois, was given several times to overflowing houses, and "Lucia," "Faust," and "Romeo and Juliet" were the other most popular productions. The night before leaving for a season in Boston, where the same operas were staged with unqualified success, "Faust" was produced at the Metropolitan, with Jean de Reszke in the name-part. He and Melba were recalled about twenty times at the close of the performance, and eventually he sat down and played the

accompaniment to her singing of "Home, Sweet Home." Throughout the stay the prima donna visited and received her friends, drove, walked, and entered into all the enjoyments of society; and in New York she followed the same course.

Arriving at the stage-door in Boston one day, she found that the crowd of early comers who were waiting for the doors to be opened had completely shut her off from the possibility of entry. She asked permission to pass through, but was firmly refused. "I merely want to reach the door," she explained. "That's just it," they said; "so do we, and we are not going to budge. We were here first, and we are due the best place to hear." "Well, you must let me pass, or you will not hear anything, for I am Madame Melba," she told them; and then the whole queue became demoralized in the endeavour to get near, and yet not impede her way.

Among the celebrities in New York that spring was Monsieur Paderewski, in whose honour Melba gave a Polish luncheon on April 20. She carried the entertainment through with delightful élan, and her humour and vivacity infected the whole party. She did not spare herself in any way, yet when she appeared at the opera the same evening she sang with such freshness and purity of tone that "all the world wondered."

Mr. Marion Crawford was another of her interesting guests during that season, and it was at one of these luncheons she first heard from the famous novelist that he had at one time contemplated becoming a professional singer himself. When passing through the hotel vestibule on this occasion, she stopped for a moment to make inquiries regarding some trifle left in

a cab or carriage the previous day. To a negro, whose face seemed familiar, she said: "Are you the man who drove me last night?" "No, ma'am, I am not the *gentleman*," he answered suavely—a response that greatly amused the little party.

Another instance of "coloured" sang-froid! Returning to New York one evening after a performance at Philadelphia, the negro porter in charge of the sleeping-car remarked to Melba, in tones of easy familiarity: "Say, Mrs. Melba, you don't remember me; but, you bet, I know you. A while back you travelled with me on train No. 27,832, and I told you that I thought Mr. Plankon [Plançon] was fine, but that I did not think there was much to your Margaret ["Faust"]. Yes, ma'am. But I take it all back now, for I saw you the other night in 'Manon Lescaut,' and your singing beat the band. Yes, ma'am, you take it from me."

The New York season terminated amid great enthusiasm on April 24, and Melba had by this time become so identified with American musical enterprise that she was not surprised to find herself described as "an American singer going to Europe for vacation." She sailed next day for England, and after three days' stay in London went on to her home in Paris, where Monsieur Jules Massenet was one of the earliest callers to congratulate her on the fresh successes which she had won for his opera abroad. The doyen of French composers in friendly intercourse always addresses her as "Madame Stradivarius."

Joachim often used the same form of address, explaining that her voice had in a marked degree a unique quality of the Stradivarius—that of sounding small in a small room and large in a large room.

For any feminine resident of Paris, a return after an extended absence always demands many visits to the dressmakers and milliners, and in this respect Melba is true to the traditions of her sex. Invariably avoiding bizarre effects, she has long been noted for the refined elegance of her toilettes, which her stately figure shows to complete advantage, and in which her favourite colour, pale blue, is frequently introduced. Yet she could not be truly described as possessing a particle of what is known as woman's "passion for dress." Her position and vocation require many clothes, and in their pretty lines, graceful draperies, and effective combinations of colour she takes all the delight of an artist, with, however, just a suspicion of feminine vanity. It would be difficult to find anyone to whom personal untidiness, or anything approaching that condition, is so repugnant as to Melba, and no one has ever set a better example in defence of a principle than she does in this particular. Often in America, Europe, and England, when she has returned to her hotel or home from an arduous engagement involving a long journey and other exhausting circumstances conducive to physical exhaustion, members of her household, knowing she was to retire immediately afterwards, have endeavoured to dissuade her from the fatigue of a change of dress, but nothing would induce her to sit down to lunch or dinner in her travel-stained raiment.

Once when touring in America the members of her orchestra attended the theatre at St. Louis in their ordinary attire, just as they had come off the train. Melba, as usual, was an early arrival on the scene, and, noticing the dress of the musicians, informed them that their appearance was an insult to the St. Louis

public and to herself, and that it would be impossible for her to accept their services under such conditions. The proceedings were a little late in commencing that night, but when the musicians took their places before the audience they were in orthodox evening dress. Another instance of her nice attitude towards her audiences may be cited. On this occasion she found that the spare leaves of her concert programme had been filled with a miscellany of distracting business advertisements. On remonstrating with her manager, he explained that through this expedient her share of the concert proceeds would be considerably augmented and a handsome extra sum be placed to her credit. "Nothing of this kind can be to my credit," she said. "Please destroy these programmes, and have others printed without any kind of advertisements."

Meanwhile rehearsals were begun for "Hamlet," in which Melba was to sing at the Opera, and in which she reappeared on May 21, 1896, before an enormous audience, which received her with a measure of applause that entirely eclipsed the demonstration made in her favour exactly seven years before, when in the same opera and on the same stage she had made her memorable début before the Parisian public. Between May 21 and June 13 inclusive she appeared in this rôle no fewer than seven times, and each appearance was rewarded with undiminished manifestations of popularity.

Thoroughly enjoying her home life in the French capital, Melba, without placing an unreasonable tax on her physical and vocal resources, was always accessible to her friends, and one afternoon she would be found at Madame Mathilde Marchesi's, the same

evening a dinner guest of the Duchess of Manchester's, and next day delighting with her song the Prince de Sagan and his guests. The Countess Jean de Castellane's was one of the few places where she occasionally dined and sang on the same evening during this happy season.

CHAPTER XIX

"So perfect is Melba's vocal utterance that by the mere emission of tone, independent of all collateral aid, she can express the whole gamut of human feeling."—SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN.

THE echoes of Melba's successes in America, and more recently at the Grand Opera, Paris, were still ringing in her ears when, on June 19, 1896, she reappeared at Covent Garden in the now universally acclaimed rôle of Juliet. Although, on many evenings prior to this, stalls and boxes for "Melba nights" had been disposed of by the libraries at greatly augmented rates, this was the first time the Opera management had officially raised the prices to the public for these specially attractive programmes. The Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and the Duke and Duchess of Fife were of the audience that evening, which the daily newspapers described as having all the appearance of a gala occasion. "Lucia," in which her singing was again described as the acme of vocal art, was the next opera given.

On June 22 took place the death of the popular manager, Sir Augustus Harris, whose friendship for Melba, and admiration for her artistic gifts, had been among the most helpful circumstances of her early career. Never had artist so fully appreciated the sympathy of a kindly manager, and on hearing of his

death Melba asked to be relieved of her part in "Rigoletto" which had been announced for June 23. On being assured of Sir Augustus's strongly expressed desire that the performances should be continued exactly as announced, except on the day of his funeral, she was persuaded not to disturb the cast; but the whole opera, although admirably sung, was unquestionably clouded by the sorrow which the performers felt at the passing away of the genial spirit who had been so closely identified with a brilliant decade in the history of opera in England.

Great interest was taken in the revival on July 16 of Massenet's "Manon Lescaut," which it was felt would assume new life owing to Melba's appearance in the title-rôle; but even her support was not sufficient to give it more than a temporary hold on the affection of the English public, although her interpretation revealed many unexpected charms. She made her greatest success with the interpolated song written specially for the English version, in which Marie Roze enacted the name-part. Quite unusual applause followed this solo, and its repetition was rapturously insisted on.

Melba, who delights in the selection of souvenirs for her friends, takes a particular pleasure in lavishing beautiful gifts on the members of her own family. During this season she presented a diamond-studded gold bag to one of her sisters, then on a visit from Australia, and the recipient, being unfortunate enough to lose it, was greatly troubled, the more so since the loss might seem to indicate inadequate appreciation of Melba's generosity. All means were taken to recover the bag, but without success, and the loser continued to worry. The prima donna went to

Tiffany's, ordered an exact replica, and pretending that it was the original restored by an anonymous finder, she handed it to her delighted sister, who only discovered the real facts several years afterwards.

Preliminary to the American opera of 1896-97, Melba gave a number of concerts, her first appearance in the United States that season being with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on November 6, when the audience in the Music Hall of the Massachusetts capital gave her a "reception that recalled the palmy days of Patti and Jenny Lind."

When the concert was over, hundreds of people, mostly matinée girls, waited for her exit from the hall, and almost overwhelmed her with the ardour of their attentions.

On November 16 the Metropolitan opera season opened with "Faust," to a great audience which lavishly applauded the work of the Australian singer, Jean de Reszke, and Lassalle. The "eerie beauty" of her voice evoked rapturous comment from all quarters, and a few days later she won, if possible, wider compliment for her acting and her "personification of melody" in "Romeo and Juliet."

Melba's first American appearance in "Traviata" was at New York on December 21, when she made a gratifying success as Violetta. "As a combination of singing and acting it was more satisfying than any seen here for many years. She invested the scene with Alfredo's father with a depth of feeling, an abundance of dramatic action, a forceful naturalness. In the last act, too, she rose to positive dramatic excellence."* Of this performance another critic

* *New York Herald.*

said: "That she sang it brilliantly those who are acquainted with her wondrous art and more wondrous voice need not be told."*

The earnestness and variety of Melba's ambition was strikingly manifested when it was announced that on December 30, 1896, at the Metropolitan Opera-House, New York, she would sing in German the rôle of Brünnhilde in Wagner's great work "Siegfried." Jean de Reszke was cast for the title-rôle, Édouard as the Wanderer, and the conductorship was in the hands of Anton Seidl. Exceptional interest was aroused in this production, wherein the accepted ideal exponent of such parts as Juliet, Marguerite, Lucia, and Gilda was to try her powers in the heroic Wagnerian rôle. In spite of all the difficulties incidental to the first staging of so great a work, the performance went with singular completeness, and the *New York Herald* wrote: "Madame Melba's Brünnhilde, all things considered, was surprisingly good. Considerable hostility had been awakened in some quarters by her intention to sing the part, and she was naturally nervous. With perfect ease she surmounted all the vocal difficulties of the score, and towards the end, as she gained more confidence, she sang with much greater freedom, and in the final duet her voice had the ring of true passion."

The *New York Tribune*, the most conservative of great American newspapers, in its criticism of this performance, after an explanation as to the impossibility of extended comment owing to the late hour at which the opera terminated, said: "It would have strained the credulity of a stranger to believe that it was a first performance, so finished was it in all

* *New York Tribune.*

respects, so full of the spirit of the work, so enthusiastic, so instinct with life, passion, and emotional colour. . . . Madame Melba's share cannot be discussed in general terms." In a more leisured comment a day or two later the same authority wrote: "The sincerity of her effort was admirable. A large party of the public went to hear her in a heroic rôle, and she has won such encomiums as her laudable and plucky experiment deserved. . . . To the loveliness of her devotion and the loftiness of her ambition honest tribute must be paid. But the music of the part does not lie well in her voice, and if she continues to sing it, it is much to be feared there will soon be an end to the charm which her voice discloses when employed in its legitimate sphere. The world can ill afford to lose a Melba, even if it should gain a Brünnhilde. But it will not gain a Brünnhilde."

The physical strain which the performance of Brünnhilde entailed on Melba fully justified the note of warning which the learned critic of the *Tribune* had so truly sounded. In some quarters it is the custom, and not unkindly, to set down this part as the one failure of her career, just as Carmen is said to have been the one exception in the long rule of successes that marked Patti's life of song. But as the latter's impersonation of Bizet's heroine is sure to have possessed many unusual charms and excellences, it must also be conceded that Melba's Brünnhilde was distinguished by the unmatched perfection of her vocalization, the dignity of her physical grace, the high intelligence and nobility of endeavour which she brought to bear on her impersonation, for which she gave nearly two years' earnest study to the music, the drama, and the language.

Melba, who had had a severe attack of blood-poisoning, was in poor health at the time of this production, and her undertaking such a rôle under these conditions was another proof of the courage in which she has never been found wanting, and which was demonstrated in a spirited manner next day, when she announced her unsuitability for the part, and her determination never to sing it again.

Almost every member of the company was at one time or other out of the bill during this season, owing to colds brought on by the severity of the winter. Melba, in spite of indifferent health, continued at her post throughout January, repeating her usual successes in "Traviata," "Romeo and Juliet," "Faust," "Rigoletto," and other rôles, and adding greatly to her personal popularity, which has never been equalled by that of any other visiting singer. Then she left for the Riviera to rest and recruit after a long term of unbroken professional activity.

After she had had a brief respite, Maurice Grau cabled to Europe urging her to return to America as the only means of saving the latter weeks of the season from disaster, but she was unable to respond to the flattering call of her manager.

CHAPTER XX

"As an exemplar of unaffected purity in vocal art, Melba surpasses all other great singers of our time."—JOACHIM.

BEFORE appearing at Covent Garden in 1897, Melba gave a concert in the Queen's Hall, of which the *Daily Telegraph* remarked: "She again exemplified the qualities which have raised her so high, and given Australia a name in art of which that young country has a right to be proud."

Although Melba was not the first Australian singer to seek European laurels, she is the only one who has won world-wide fame. The pioneer was Madame Lucy Chambers, daughter of a New South Wales magistrate, who about the time of Melba's birth was successfully singing in opera throughout Italy under the name of Lucia Chamberini. In after-years, when Madame Chambers retired from the stage and settled in Melbourne as a teacher of singing, she used to say that her memory should be perpetuated in Australian musical history as the only Australian teacher who did not claim to have taught Melba.

The late Luscombe Searelle, author, artist, opera- and theatre-manager, was in Melbourne during the days when Melba, as a young amateur, was endeavouring to get a professional engagement. He had advertised for singers to take a few subordinate parts,

and she was among the anxious applicants. He tried her voice, said it was pretty good, though not good enough for him, and that she wanted more training. Some years afterwards, when she had become famous, he was visiting London, which was then ringing with echoes of her success. She was passing to her carriage through the hall of the Savoy Hotel one day, when she saw Mr. Searelle. She beckoned him to her, but there was no look of recognition on his face as he responded. Then she said: "I see you have forgotten me, Mr. Searelle. My name is Melba. I am the girl you would not engage in Melbourne because my voice was only passable and wanted training. Good-morning." And as she turned away, without giving him any chance for response, the disconcerted manager could only join in her mischievous laughter.

Her first appearance at the opera in 1897 was on June 23, at the gala performance given by command of Queen Victoria in honour of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee; at this performance Melba, supported by Jean de Reszke, Édouard de Reszke, Pol Plançon, and Mademoiselle Bauermeister, performed in the third act of "Romeo and Juliet." The gorgeousness of the spectacle at this performance was greatly intensified by the magnificent uniforms and native dresses of the visiting princes and potentates, who had come from all parts of the world to join in the historic celebration.

The experiment of augmenting the prices, which the favour of "Romeo and Juliet" had rendered successfully possible in 1896, was continued this season, and with gratifying results, even when Jean de Reszke was not in the cast with the Australian singer. The increase of admission rates to the stalls on

"Melba nights" thenceforward became a usual detail in the Covent Garden management, whether her support was supplied by Alvarez, Saleza, Caruso, or Bonci.

The announcement that Melba would only sing at Covent Garden on a few occasions that season was sufficient to attract a vast audience to "Faust" on June 28, when her Marguerite elicited innumerable recalls from a most demonstrative house. The velvety tones of her lower notes never sounded so beautiful as in the earlier scenes that night, while the brilliancy of her upper register reached a stage of dazzling perfection in the last act.

During this summer season she spent all her spare time on the river, and from Fernley visited all places of interest in the neighbourhood. One of these excursions was to Stoke Poges Churchyard, where Gray wrote his famous elegy, and where his remains are buried. The beauty of the scene, the traditions, and the surroundings appealed to Melba's imagination, and, borrowing the key from an old woman in charge, she entered the church. After a little parley it was found that the caretaker was willing to blow the organ bellows, so Melba seated herself at the organ, and began playing. Then she sang Gounod's "Ave Maria," and followed it with other selections, of which the finale was the National Anthem. The old woman, who had no idea of the singer's identity, was delighted, and, in expressing her pleasure and thanks, said: "'Twas all very wonderful, but I liked 'God save the Queen' best." When the Vicar made an appearance, and, attracted by the unusual singing, asked who the vocalist was, one of the party gave the desired information, on which the clergyman further asked: "And who is Madame Melba?"

When it was decided to celebrate the centenary of Donizetti at Bergamo, the authorities sought the services of Melba, so that all possible éclat should be given to the occasion. Her assumption of the part of Lucia had given Donizetti's opera a new lease of popularity, and endowed it with a "drawing" power it had never known at other hands. In one respect Melba stands supremely apart from all great singers of to-day, from all great singers of the last half-century, and that is by reason of her unparalleled control of breath. When she is singing the most difficult of sustained passages, her chest is as motionless as a block of marble. This quality, together with the great flexibility of her voice, equips her in a unique way for the perfect rendering of the runs, trills, shakes, and other graces with which "Lucia" abounds, and which she executes with a precision of attack, an evenness of tone, and an elegance of phrasing, unapproached by any living singer. To Melba's unequalled qualifications the Italian people paid generous testimony, by passing over the many superbly gifted native singers in favour of a foreign artist, whose singing would give to the dead master's music a perfection that could not be counted for from any other exponent.

Anton Seidl, the distinguished composer and conductor under whose baton Melba had achieved many successes, and who to some extent resented the occasional charge of reserve in her acting, which he described as a "certain noble indifference," wrote about this time a description of her voice and its use which it would be difficult to excel:

"Now I come to Madame Melba, in whom we find the prodigal richness of one of the most beautiful

voices that ever rang from human throat. Melba's voice has a magical, fairy-like tone, and yet, with all the charm of sound, there is present such a roundness of technique that one is simply amazed. Generally, heretofore, *coloratura* singers have not grown in very luxurious profusion with sustained cantilena or melody. Patti alone hitherto had both in the highest completeness ; but in Madame Melba song and technique are present, not only in the greatest completeness, but brilliant, fairy-like, and as if shining with supernatural glory. The trill in her case is of quite fabulous sustention ; for instance, she has at her command a long and powerful crescendo on the highest notes that is without a parallel, and yet performed with a clearness and certainty which simply excite astonishment, and at the same time soft, clinging, and cajoling. Her science of taking breaths is complete, and infallibly calculated for the length of a musical phrase, never left to chance or error, but ever firm, even, and without deception. In 'Lucia' the Madwoman's Scene could not possibly have been better heard by the composer himself. It is impossible to think of a higher education in technical power and performance for a human throat."

Among those at Bergamo for this celebration were Joachim and one of his nieces, Herr Robert von Mendelssohn, Piatti, and Frau von Keudel, with whom Melba went on many excursions. The little party on one outing invaded a peasant's cottage, and were regaled with macaroni, which was so deliciously cooked that Melba persuaded her friends to return with her another day, and wait while the peasant taught her the exact method followed in the preparation of the Italian dish.

CHAPTER XXI

"Mon admiration pour l'artiste était si profonde que j'avais comme peine de vous connaître. Laissez-moi vous dire, chère Madame, que la femme vaut l'artiste, et que la nature a bien su faire les choses."—E. FERNANDEZ ARBOS.

THE American season of 1897-8, under the management of Messrs. Charles Ellis and Walter Damrosch, was full of incident, embracing as it did the limits of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific, which latter coast she had not visited on any of her earlier trips. To add to her comfort on this expedition, a luxurious private car, which afforded ample accommodation for a party of six and all necessary attendants, and which could be attached to ordinary or special train as circumstances demanded, was secured for her use. The Pullman Company christened it "Melba," and had her name emblazoned on the panel. The maintenance of this little house on wheels, in which she was to live throughout her tour, necessitated the employment of a conductor, porter, chef, and waiter, in addition to her personal servants. The chef and waiter were so supreme in their vocations that she dubbed them "Jean" and "Édouard" out of compliment to her peerless colleagues, the de Reszkes. The rent of the "Melba" car was £10 ($50) a day, and the additional cost of moving it in the Eastern States was the price of

eighteen first-class tickets, and in the Western States the price of fifteen first-class tickets, over the distance traversed.

For the mapped-out course these particular charges amounted to £725 ($3,500), and the incidental expenses included payments at the following rates: Chef, £40 ($200) a month; waiter, £15 ($75); conductor, £15 ($75); and coloured porter, £10 ($50). The other principal expenses were the food-supplies and tips.

Before taking up her abode in this movable apartment, Melba completed her season in New York, where at the Metropolitan Opera-House, on January 28, 1898, she made her American début in "The Barber of Seville"; her sparkling treatment of the text and naturally beautiful rendering of the music delighting everybody. "Traviata" was received in the same spirit, and the charm of her dramatic reading was universally commended. To repeat the eulogy lavished on her in connection with these productions, and her older successes in New York, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Washington, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, and the other cities visited, would be to draw on the entire store of the language's superlatives. At Chicago the "Barber" was described as the most sensational triumph for many years, and her comedy scenes were compared to the work of Réjane and Judic. During a flying visit to Philadelphia on January 13, she introduced herself to the American people in the more important rôle of Aïda, and received universal approbation, in the course of which the *Philadelphia Bulletin* said: "Not only did this marvellous artist achieve another success, but she seemed to open

another chapter in the history of her career. Two or three years since she was universally accepted as the greatest living soprano, but it was purely as a vocalist that she obtained the name. This year and in this city she has changed all this. She is now a very sentient being in every character she portrays; her action is full of significance, her passion moving, her tenderness touching, and her strength undeniable. In the third act nothing more seductively convincing could be imagined, and the actress for once made her matchless natural gift subservient to her acquired skill."

In the course of this season's tournée, Melba took every opportunity that offered of hearing great artists and seeing the wonderful natural beauties of the country. At Minneapolis she had a chance to see Modjeska as Marie Stuart, and was deeply impressed and saddened by the performance. Betweenwhiles she was full of life and gaiety, always ready with a joke to enliven the tedium of the journeys, and never niggardly of her laughter when the joke was turned against herself. A boy selling fruit and candy one day entered her car from the other section of the train, and after making some purchases she asked: "Would you like to go to the opera to-night?" "Why, sure," said he. "Would you like to hear Melba?" she went on; and the lad answered: "Well, I should smile." "Then," said she, pointing to the manager, "go over to that gentleman, and tell him I said he would give you tickets for yourself and your mother or some friend." The boy, in amused surprise, asked: "Well, who are you, anyway?" "I'm Madame Melba," she responded; and the unabashed young candy-vendor quickly broke in: "Go on! I've seen Madame Melba, and she's real pretty." Loving

honesty herself, she did not resent it in the young critic, and the tickets were given to him.

Continuing the tour westwards, Melba was most cordially received in San Francisco, and many social functions were organized in her honour. At one of these private parties given by Mrs. de Young, Melba had a narrow escape from death, as a heavy bronze bust, which was knocked from its stand, struck her on the side of the head, and she fell to the floor unconscious. On regaining her senses she quickly recovered her composure, but the hosts and guests were greatly alarmed, and the incident provided the excitement of the hour at the Golden Gate.

At the time of this her first visit to San Francisco the trouble between America and Spain was at its height, and feeling ran very strong in the Western city, the centre of early Spanish settlement, and a city where the presence of so many descendants of the Castilian pioneers was in itself sufficient to intensify the resentment of the great majority. Melba's appearance in "The Barber of Seville" on April 21 had been widely advertised and completely prepared, and the declaration of war between the two countries was made too late to allow of an easy change. The production of Spanish opera on such an eventful day, and before a public not always given to the complete restraint of old and conservative communities, was felt to be a very risky undertaking, but under the circumstances there was no alternative but to go on with the announced bill. Melba faced the situation with a certain amount of tremor, and went from scene to scene fearing each succeeding moment might release the hostility which the audience were keeping in check by the most slender of conditions.

Throughout the earlier stages of the tour she had followed the usual tradition of introducing interpolated numbers in the Lesson Scene, her choice running through "Still wie die Nacht," "Sevilliana," "Mattinata," "Home, Sweet Home," the Mad Scene from "Lucia," and "The Old Folks at Home." On the night in question Melba took her seat at the piano, and electrified the assemblage by starting the country's national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner." Rarely, surely, was there such a scene of enthusiasm in any theatre! Many circumstances have tended to give Key's stirring song special significance in the Californian capital, where his statue inscribed with his verses is one of the sights of the city. Great Britain had been careful to evidence her sympathy with America throughout the dissension with Spain, and when the singer, in a moment of impulse, made herself the mouthpiece of her country's feelings, it can easily be imagined what impression was created by her diplomatic action. The declaration of war was fresh in the ears of her audience when her voice rang out to them in the rallying cry of their nation.

Before the end of the first verse the whole house was standing; the close of the second verse found the people in such a state of fervour that Melba herself was completely carried away by its intensity, and having started on the third verse, she found herself unable to continue. Tears were on the cheeks of hundreds in the theatre, tears were also on the cheeks of Melba as she stood there, incongruously enough, in her gay Spanish dress; and as she turned away, for once in her life unable to control the voice which is little short of magical in its response to her behest, the people roared again their tribute of admiration for the woman and the artist.

CHAPTER XXII

"To Madame Nellie Melba, the great artist, the favourite of the gods, my highest and sincerest admiration." — MILKA TERNINA.

FOR the London season of 1898 Melba could only arrange to accept three engagements, opening in "Traviata," which she then sang in London for the first time. Among the audience on that occasion was Madame Adelina Patti, who from Mr. Alfred de Rothschild's box watched and applauded the Australian singer's interpretation of a rôle which had been her own favourite part in earlier days. Melba next essayed Rosina in "The Barber of Seville," which some connoisseurs pronounced her best part, and of which the *Daily Telegraph* wrote: "Her Rosina last evening was as magnetic as the Ring itself. Covent Garden could not hold all who came to listen to her." Among them was the Princess of Wales. A leading writer, in a summary on her opening performance, expressed the opinion that she might easily make herself one of the first actresses on the operatic stage through her splendid presence, magnificent assurance, obvious intelligence, and other gifts which were possessed by few of her rivals; and ascribed any possible limitations which might be evident to her indisposition to take the necessary

pains. Never was a guess so wide of the mark, for Melba's care and industry are among her strongest points.

As befits a lady who personally superintends the affairs of her own household, she is an early riser—especially so for a singer—and no matter how late she may have retired, she always breakfasts soon after eight o'clock, and two hours later has finished her private correspondence and conferred with her secretary as to the mass of general letters which she daily receives.

There is nothing of the "slippers and tea-gown" prima donna about Melba. She is always alert and ready, with the disposition to devote infinite pains and perseverance to any undertaking with which she may be identified. These qualities are in some measure responsible for the reputation as a clever business woman which she enjoys, and which drew from a London literary man the remark: "It would have been all the same whatever she turned her mind to; if she had opened a bonnet shop, she would have become the first milliner in Europe." In view of the public estimation of her talents as a woman of affairs, it is amusing to know that in a game of dominoes her powers of calculation are so limited that she has to count on her fingers.

Although Melba has not largely identified herself with the great classics of a bygone age—the operas of Glück, Mozart, and Beethoven, from which, however, she regularly sings excerpts at her concerts—she must be credited with a larger measure of artistic enterprise than that manifested by her great predecessors. Jenny Lind's répertoire was so limited as to supply that rare singer with a strong

MELBA AS "ROSINA" IN "THE BARBER OF SEVILLE"

argument in favour of her premature retirement from the operatic stage; and it has not been shown that in her subsequent concert work, even while resident in Germany, she took any part in the establishment of Wagner's prestige. Tietjens, it is true, was denied the opportunity of appearing in any Wagnerian rôle, save that of her incomparable Ortrud. Nilsson's only portrayal in Wagner's operas was Elsa, whereas Patti never once identified herself with any of his music. On the other hand, Melba, after a complete study of his works, appeared, as already shown, in "Lohengrin," "Tannhäuser," and "Siegfried," although Elsa is the only Wagnerian character with which she has intimately identified herself. Her association with the unconventional opera of the present day is best illustrated by her Mimi in "La Bohème."

During the same year she is found captivating audiences in London and New York in a series of operas running from "Lohengrin" to "Lucia di Lammermoor," from "Aïda" to "Elaine," from "Carmen" to "Pagliacci," from "Tannhäuser" to "The Barber of Seville." On a private occasion, when portions of "Siegfried" were given for the entertainment of Her Majesty the Queen, Melba also sang the music of "The Forest Bird"—with what results can be imagined by a public accustomed to hearing those lovely phrases indifferently rendered.

Despite the brevity of her London sojourn in 1898, Melba followed her usual custom of singing at least once for some charitable object, and gave her services at a Stafford House concert, organized by the Duchess of Sutherland, for a church fund con-

nected with a poor district of the Staffordshire Potteries. She chose for her principal number the famous air from "Il Re Pastore," to which the violin obbligato was played by Joachim, who even in the last days of his noble life repeated anew his profound admiration for her exquisite art.

Her personal devotion to this distinguished master formed one of the great friendships of her career. A fine bust of him occupies the place of honour in the main corridor of her home, and his picture always stands among the elect in her salon or library.

"Everything you sing, you cannot sing
over Nellie Melba.

I said it and I stick to it!

Joseph Joachim.

Fernley,
June 26th
1898

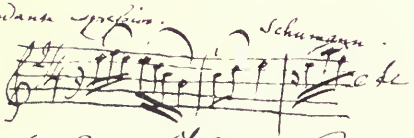
AUTOGRAPH MESSAGE FROM JOACHIM

"Philomele." Göthe.

"Dich hat Amor gewiss, o Sängerin fütternd erzogen;
Kindisch reichte der Gott dir mit dem Pfeile die Kost.
So, durchdrungen vom Gift die harmlos athmende Kehle,
Trifft mit der Liebe Gewalt nun Philomele das Herz."
(Philomelba)

Andante espressivo. Schumann.

Quartett. etc



Joseph Joachim Johann Kruse
Emanuel Wirth.

In remembrance of May 6th in Berlin and of a sincere admirer and friend

Joseph Joachim

Robert Hausmann May 1897.

FACSIMILE PAGE SHOWING AUTOGRAPHS OF JOACHIM, JOHANN KRUSE, EMANUEL WIRTH AND ROBERT HAUSMANN

CHAPTER XXIII

"A Churchman, dear Madame Melba, is often a poor judge of lay matters; but that you should have attained pre-eminence, despite your persistent disregard for those nuances of diplomacy which I have always understood to be essential to the structure of operatic fame, is perhaps the most singular feature of your professional life."—ARCHBISHOP CORRIGAN (New York).

AFTER Melba's conquest of the Western States, it was universally admitted that she had secured a unique position with the American people, and she at once agreed to another tour for 1898-99. By this time innumerable soaps and sauces, ribbons and ruffles, had been named after her. The prettiness of her professional name, combined with her fame and popularity, has since induced many a fond mother to borrow it for her child, and Melba regularly receives photographs of little girls who have been christened after her. The passenger list of an Australian mail-steamer not long ago revealed a still broader compliment, for two of the travellers from Adelaide bore as their family designation the pseudonym of the prima donna. Except in legal documents, Melba is now never described by her own first name, Helen, which stately appellation is her favourite.

One day this season, when passing a very showy drug-store, which had its entire front space covered

with glaring advertisements of "Melba" perfume, she went in to test its quality. This she found of such a character that she felt called upon to remonstrate with the proprietor: "How dare you attach my name to such vile stuff! And how dare you use my name at all without consulting me!" The druggist took her expostulations quite coolly, and answered: "It's no use you making a fuss. I have as much right to it as you have, for your real name is Mrs. Armstrong." Knowing the right of his contention, she retired gracefully, but immediately patented the name "Melba" in America, so that she may control its use in all such matters.

From an artistic standpoint, this her fifth visit to America, once again under the business direction of Mr. Charles Ellis, was mainly notable for her first appearance in "La Bohème," which took place at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia, on December 29, 1898. In the earlier part of the year she had found time to visit Lucca, the birthplace of the composer Puccini, and to study with him there the opera which had so attracted her, despite the apathetic attitude adopted towards this work by almost every foreign connoisseur who had been approached regarding it. Speaking of this visit, Melba has said: "Puccini came for two hours daily during the ten days of my study, and I was well pleased with the work I did. He thoroughly explained his ideas of the music; we rehearsed it bit by bit; and my score is full of his pencil markings and annotations. Some of my friends like it better than anything else I sing. I have great faith in Puccini's gifts. I delight in singing his music, and I believe him to be the coming Italian composer."

Subsequently, in England, she advised Puccini to see Belasco's pathetic Japanese play, and discussed with him its musical possibilities, which he eventually utilized in his opera "Madame Butterfly," in which it was at first anticipated she would create the title-rôle.

What was said to be an unauthorized version of "La Bohème" had already been given in America by the Bagetto and Royal Italian Opera companies, but it had failed to make any impression on the public. The influence of Melba speedily changed all that, and her power gave it a ready cachet, which could not have been secured by any other means. The crowds, who came at first out of curiosity to hear the singer in a new rôle, came again and again to hear her in one which her voice and art raised to unforeseen eminence. Despite her fine physique, dignified stage presence, and full round voice, she gave a wholly admirable representation of the pathetic grisette, true to nature in every essential, from the careless gaiety of her first meeting with Rodolfo to her tender death scene in his garret studio.

Although the part is never unduly dominant, and Melba never for a moment neglects to efface herself in the artistic demands of its correct portrayal, yet the audience on that first night felt and understood what the production owed to her. After the third act there were no fewer than sixteen recalls. Time after time Melba came out, leading the whole company with her, but the people refused to be satisfied until she appeared alone to receive the tribute of regard they were so eager to pay her. Next day the verdict of the public was given—"Hail, Melba!

Hail, Puccini!" A little later, when the opera was performed in Boston, Mr. Philip Hale said: "Melba sang with infinite beauty of tone, with a musical and dramatic intelligence that made their way straight to the heart. The actress was not jealous of the singer. The singer was not forgetful of the librettist. A most excellent piece of work; one that will live long in the memory."

In addition to the metropolis, where she joined forces with Maurice Grau, the cities visited by her company included Philadelphia, as already mentioned, Chicago, Boston, Buffalo, Rochester, Kansas, Denver, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, where the season closed. In all these centres, except Los Angeles, Melba stipulated for a performance of "La Bohème," thus giving Puccini's work the impress of an invaluable and extended introduction.

Some of the members of the company were Gadski, Zélie de Lussan, Bonnard, Pandolfini, Ellison Van Hoose, and Bensaude, and there was great good-fellowship between the whole party. Madame Gadski's little girl, who was a persistent opera-goer, caused much amusement by insisting that she much preferred the singing of Melba to that of her adoring mother. The prima donna, who is very interested in children, was always getting into conversation with those she encountered on her travels. One day, while standing outside her private car at Chicago, a tiny newsboy passed along the platform, and, noticing that his scanty clothes were quite unsuitable for the bitter weather, she asked: "How long have you got to stand here?" "Until I sell these fifty papers." "Well, I'll buy

the fifty," said Melba; and the shivering child, afraid to realize his good fortune, asked in surprise: "But have you got enough money?"

One of those days in New York a struggling literary friend disposed of a short story to an agent, who paid a very fair rate of remuneration—£20 ($100)—but who wished to attach his own name to it, instead of the writer's *nom de plume*. He probably intended resetting the story or making some kind of alterations, and, as the author was only using a pen-name, the agent may have felt that the writer would not be suffering any injury through its publication above the agent's better-known appellation. The writer readily consented, and some time afterwards mentioned the matter to Melba, who was indignant. "How much did he pay you for your story?" she asked; and when told, she said: "Then, go at once and get it. I will pay him back his £20; if necessary, I will pay him £40; but I won't allow you to be denied the credit due to you;" and before the friend left the house a pledge had been given to Melba either to get back the manuscript or insist on its publication under the name of its creator.

Like most observant people who have travelled widely, read much, and been thrown into close association with great personalities, Melba is an excellent conversationalist, and rarely allows her own affairs to be intruded. Few women can tell a story with better effect, and few can more fully appreciate the stories of others. A voracious reader, her preference is given to biography and history, although she finds restful recreation in the American short story and more pretentious popular fiction, of which her

favourite example is Jack London's "Call of the Wild." Among the great novels, those that interest her most are the stories of Balzac, of which she has a complete knowledge, and to which she returns again and again. In poetry, the appeal of Shakespeare to a woman like Melba would naturally be paramount, and her next choice falls, strangely, upon Omar Khayyám.

Having a pronounced objection to slang, and speaking English with exquisite purity, she at odd and unexpected moments surprises her friends by one or two outlandish expressions, uttered in a spirit of mischief; after which, with lightly concealed amusement, she watches the faces of her hearers, in much the same fashion as a vivacious schoolgirl who by some unusual word or phrase has sought to alarm the righteousness of her adoring elders.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Melba! She has, perhaps, the most pure and crystal voice of the present century. It is an intense physical pleasure to hear such a voice at all, an intense mental pleasure to hear it used as it was the other night."—ROBERT S. HICHENS.

EXACTLY eleven years had passed between Melba's first introduction to Covent Garden and her appearance there in "Romeo and Juliet" on May 25, 1899, her *rentrée* for that season. What changes had taken place in that interval! The mere announcement of her name was now sufficient to draw a crowded and brilliant house, which numbered the Duke of York, the Duchess of Fife, Princess Charles of Denmark, and other members of the Royal Family. Her brilliant colleague of earlier seasons, Jean de Reszke, was not there to impersonate young Montague. The opera was one in which the wonderful couples Patti and Mario, and Patti and Nicolini, had failed to arouse wide public interest, and there was no special circumstance of staging, dressing, or casting on this occasion to appeal to the public in any particular, apart from Melba herself, to whom the glory of her achievement was ungrudgingly given by the whole London press. Surely, never in the history of opera had such universal praise been bestowed on any artist as that which was accorded

Melba in the criticisms of this performance. The *Daily Telegraph* may be quoted as a sample: "For her countless admirers the season always seems to lack its crown and completeness until this superbly gifted artist has appeared. . . . It was as Juliet that Madame Melba first woke the senses of opera-goers to a full appreciation of her splendid powers. Gounod's exquisite music had never really caught the public ear until the Australian cantatrice graced it with her matchless voice. Not even Adelina Patti could win enduring favour for the work in the days when Juliet was among the characters that belonged to her at Covent Garden. . . . If one thing more than another was remarkable in her performance, it was the ease of Madame Melba's acting." The *Times*, no less generous, dwelt on the unmatched loveliness of her vocal tone, and, in commenting on the great expansion of her dramatic powers, declared her rendering to be near perfection.

A German critic, dwelling on the dramatic intensity of her acting, felt called on to warn her against the repetition of similar abandonment, as sure to interfere with the perfection of her vocal utterance. The fact cannot be lost sight of, that when, instead of the equally effective illusion, the possessor of a beautiful voice surrenders herself to the actual emotion which a scene of poignancy demands, she must also surrender much of the voice's beauty; for emotional intensity so seriously contracts a singer's throat as to make the emission of perfect tone an impossibility. Whatever difference of opinion the critics elected to hold on other occasions with regard to her dramatic powers, they were on this date unanimous as to the inspiration

of musical feeling "in this amazing singer, who affords a greater sense of completeness than any other artist."*

Even the most doleful of pessimists would have been elated by such a chorus of approbation, and Melba's responsive heart was deeply touched by the regard and appreciation of the whole London public. No trace of empty vanity even then entered what she herself has described as her "level Scottish head." The independence and straightforwardness which were discussed by those who knew her were no matter of recent growth. They were the same qualities which had asserted themselves even before she had made many steps towards fame, as on those easily remembered occasions when she declined to make a second appointment with Carl Rosa, and when she refused to allow her advance to depend on the selection of a certain dramatic teacher in Paris.

Melba's enthusiasm for "La Bohème" led to its production at Covent Garden, the first performance in Italian taking place on July 1, about two years after the Carl Rosa Opera Company had introduced the work elsewhere with an English libretto—but with no very great success. It is no secret that the management were not sanguine over the production, and that Melba, in order to secure them against possible loss, promised to supplement all her appearances in it with some favourite scena until the new Italian opera became thoroughly established in public favour—a promise which she gladly redeemed by singing one of her popular arias after the performance, until her judgment was abundantly justified.

* *Morning Advertiser.*

Mr. Joseph Bennett was among the London critics who were charmed with Melba's rôle, and held that "never before had she seemed so completely in touch with the character assumed, while the scene of Mimi's death was as touching as art could make it. The performance was received with a crescendo of approval which ended in a triumphant climax."

It had now become an established custom with her to take a house on the River Thames, generally in the vicinity of Marlow, during the months of June, July, and August, and to this cool retreat she always hurried at the close of her engagements in London, even after the opera, from which she was obliged to return by special train. During these terms of river residence Melba did her utmost to make the place attractive for her colleagues in art, and there she loved to entertain them.

At the close of this opera term, during which everybody had been full of kindness to her, Melba decided to make that season's verdict a lasting impression for her, and resolved never again to read her newspaper notices. "It will be much better so," she said. "Whenever anything very kind is published about me, some friend is sure to cheer me by telling me of it. Whenever anything disagreeable is written concerning me, it will be best that I should miss it, for in spite of everything I am easily—too easily—discouraged." This resolution she has kept, without any air of superiority, without any claim to self-sacrifice.

During the years when Melba read every available expression of opinion on her professional work, she never evinced the slightest curiosity as to what her acquaintances or the world in general thought of

her as a private individual, and winced, as she often does to-day, at the public discussion of her personal affairs. It is an odd circumstance that for several seasons after her operatic début, whenever any announcement of her artistic successes appeared in the Australian papers, the members of her family regarded this publicity with more humiliation than pride, and never discussed such news with their friends. The passing years have modified this attitude, but, in spite of everything, Melba still retains a trace of the rigid Presbyterianism in which she was reared.

Melba once laughingly confided to an inquirer that when she retires from the stage she will cultivate the personal friendship of the music critics, and enjoy an exchange of reminiscences. Meanwhile she adheres to her conviction that unbiassed judgment is practically impossible where the critic and the person criticized are warm personal friends, and for this reason she conscientiously holds herself aloof from the connoisseurs who are called on to pronounce a public opinion on her efforts—a resolve by which she has, doubtless, missed illuminating association with many delightful men and women, whose intellectual gifts under other circumstances none could more fully appreciate than she. In view of this attitude, which has occasionally been misunderstood, it is the more interesting to recall one night at the height of the London opera season some years ago, when Melba, much exhausted after a long performance, drove to all the leading newspaper offices in the City, and personally asked the editors to ignore an unfortunate accidental mishap which had befallen one of the younger Continental singers

during the opera, the public mention of which would probably have retarded the promising career of a gifted young artist. The picture of Melba, the darling of the operatic world, whirling round London at midnight, to excuse—and rightly excuse—the artistic blunder of an obscure colleague, is one that will not come readily to the public eye; for even among many of her admiring followers it is an accepted belief that the Australian soprano never casts aside the mantle of autocratic arrogance with which popular imagination has long since, though mistakenly, enveloped her.

About September 1899, was completed a bust of herself, from the chisel of Mr. Bertram Mackennal, another native of Melbourne who had made a name in London; and in offering it to the trustees of the National Gallery, Melbourne, she wrote: "I beg that you will accept it from a daughter of the city, as a tribute of her unfailing remembrance and affection. May I express the hope that I am not wholly forgotten in our beloved country, and that the very cordial greetings which I venture to send through you to my brother and sister Australians will not be without a kindly response?" The gift was received with grateful appreciation, and unveiled by Lord Brassey, then Governor of Victoria.

MADAME MELBA

C. HADDON CHAMBERS, DRAMATIC AUTHOR E. BERTRAM MACKENNAL, SCULPTOR

AN AUSTRALIAN TRIO

CHAPTER XXV

"Der schönste Gesang bliebt immer der, welcher in irgend einer Form in der Kunst zur völligen Natur wird; sicher wird dieses Ziel am seltensten im Coloraturgesang erreicht, weil hier die enormen technischen Schwierigkeiten nur in seltenen Fällen eine völlige Beherrschung zulassen Die Gesangskunst der Frau Melba repräsentirt einen solchen Ausnahmefall"—PROFESSOR MARTIN KRAUSE (Leipzig).

MELBA'S Continental *tournée* for the winter of 1899 began in Holland during November, and was but a repetition of the successes which she had already won in all the other countries she had visited. At Amsterdam and Rotterdam the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. The young Queen, who evinces greater interest in other arts than in that of music, was not in either city during the prima donna's visit, and for the first time in her career Melba's artistic success was not endorsed by the Sovereign of the country in which she was performing. The operas given were "Faust," "Traviata," "Rigoletto," "Lucia," and Massenet's "Manon Lescaut," which were also drawn on for her appearances in Germany and Austria.

For her first concert in Berlin, which took place at the Philharmonic Hall, many people were unable to obtain admission, and numbers of ladies in evening dress stood throughout. Her programme for

the occasion included Handel's "Sweet Bird," "L'amerò" from Mozart's "Il Re Pastore," Delibes's "Les Filles de Cadix," and Verdi's "Ah, fors' è lui." For the Mozart air she had the superlative advantage of a violin obbligato played by her friend Joachim, and when both artists came on the platform together the ovation accorded them was exceptional, Melba bowing to the veteran so that all might understand her acknowledgment of his greatness and his popularity.

After she had finished her programme numbers, the audience, including the orchestra, broke into a further prolonged outburst of applause, and she returned to the platform many times to acknowledge the verdict of the Berlin public, on whose favour she set great store, especially on this occasion of her first public appearance in the city. Seeing that the house would not be satisfied with her bows and smiles, she sat down at the piano, and to her own accompaniment sang a German song, Bohm's "Still wie die Nacht." This but increased the clamour of the audience, and she was obliged to add another encore, this time an English song, which she also accompanied. Still the people waited on, cheering and applauding, and Melba, growing tired from the repeated recalls, was at her wits' end how to close the proceedings. She had long since decided never to sing with an orchestra any item she had not rehearsed with them, so it was impossible to add an orchestral number; and as she was too fatigued again to undertake the dual rôle of singer and accompanist a pianist was found, and it was only after she had added a third extra song that the audience permitted her to depart. By that time, owing to her multitudinous

bows and head-shakes, a tress of her hair had become loosened, and as she brushed it back from her forehead in her final rush from the platform, the audience joined in her own happy laughter.

One of the personal pleasures of this Berlin visit was the meeting with Fritz Müller, a little boy protégé from her native city, in whose home-coming she had taken a practical part, and who has since made a considerable reputation throughout Germany as a pianist and composer.

During the first week in December she sang "Lucia di Lammermoor," which was attended by the Emperor and Empress and a most brilliant audience. The singer herself has recalled the visit as follows: "After the Mad Scene I was summoned to the Imperial box, where I was received by their Majesties. I went just as I was in my white Lucia dress and streaming, dishevelled hair. They were both most gracious. I found the Emperor very musical, and he discussed with me various methods of obtaining certain vocal effects. He said he had never known such enthusiasm in the Imperial Opera-House before. 'I hope you will come often to sing at my Opera,' were his last words to me. I was to have sung only four times during my visit, but these appearances had to be extended to nine owing to the demands of the public."

Her paradoxical combination of spontaneity and restraint is an artistic quality that found great favour with German musicians, and a connoisseur, in describing her as the gaoler of a seemingly limitless melody, commented on the reticence of her art as unknown to the same degree in any other great singer of the day.

Even in Italy, where effective extravagance of vocalization in any really competent singer always secures noisy acclaim from the unthinking, her phenomenal facility never tempted her to exaggeration, and this reticence was made the subject of unstinted eulogy.

Endowed with qualifications of voice and technique that render the embellishments of song a matter of unsurpassed ease, she never allows the attainment of startling vocal effects to interfere with the artistic design of a phrase. Her unfailing good taste in this direction is a fine example for all singers. In the case of most of the beautiful voices of our day the full attraction of the organ is often disclosed on a single hearing, but with Melba, owing to her extraordinary vocal refinement—which calls for a certain measure of refinement in those who hear—the reverse is the case, and each successive experience reveals hitherto undreamt-of qualities of tonal beauty, of expression, and of equipment. The voice and art grow on the listener until the thorough enjoyment of Melba's singing makes it almost difficult for her admirers to enjoy any other. Even people who have frequently been ravished by the loveliness of her public performance can have little idea what that singing means in the more intimate atmosphere of home, where the boy-like clarity of the voice, its opulence of "colour," the insistent youth of every note, and the almost eerie spontaneity of her production, can so charge with feeling each vocal phrase that even the eyes of her own family grow dim as they listen to some simple melody they have heard scores, even hundreds, of times.

Before quitting Germany, Joachim conveyed a

graceful compliment to Melba by presenting her with a miniature violin, exquisitely fashioned in ebony, as an illustration of the people's mourning over her departure.

At the close of the Berlin season Melba made a flying visit to Paris, where she was sought out by a representative of the *Figaro*, who was anxious to get direct impressions of her Dutch and German visits. The South African War was still raging, and feeling against England ran high in the French capital during those unfortunate days that preceded the *Entente Cordiale* Melba's horror of war under any circumstances was intensified by the fact that several of her own dear kinsmen and friends had already fallen in the struggle. Whenever the war was mentioned, it was with difficulty that she could restrain her tears. And when the *Figaro* writer found her at the Hôtel Ritz, she waived aside the question of her professional work, and upbraided him for his country's want of sympathy with hers. Boldly she asked :

" Pourquoi êtes-vous en France si méchants pour mon pays ? Voyons ! nous aimons tant chez nous tout ce qui est français. Ce n'est pas gentil de vous montrer presque heureux de nos revers."

It was the New Year, the season in Paris when even professed enemies try to make expression of mutual good-will, and the journalist gallantly assured Melba that French animosity towards England had been greatly exaggerated, and with courteous concern asked when she would return to the opera.

" Croyez-vous vraiment que cela soit possible en ce moment ? Une Anglaise à l'Opéra de Paris ?" Receiving protestations that the politics of Mr.

Chamberlain would not be remembered within the temple of music, Melba added : " Je chanterai peut-être pendant la prochaine grande Exposition. La guerre sera terminée, je l'éspère, à ce moment, et les Français nous considéront de nouveau comme des amis."

This incident was but the shadow of an earlier stand. At a time when France was swayed in the throes of her great latter-day internal tumult, when even the bravest and most popular of her sons feared to acknowledge the doubts with which they were torn, who can recall without admiration the courage of Melba, a sensitive woman, an alien within the gates, an artist dependent on the favour of a foreign public, who, unabashed and fearless, came forward, and with unreserved emphasis publicly proclaimed her faith in the innocence of the persecuted soldier! All Paris would resent her rashness, it was said, but she cheerfully faced the threatened odds, and spoke for justice.

As in the case of Russia, Melba's visit to the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the result of an Imperial summons from the country's ruler, the Emperor Francis Joseph; so it follows that she was sure of a most kindly reception. Her initial appearance was in a concert on January 8, when an overflowing throng came to greet her. Her programme was made up of favourite operatic selections, and next day she was honoured with an invitation to sing Violetta in " Traviata " at the Imperial Opera-House on January 19, the prices throughout the house being largely increased. Although German is the official language of that establishment, she was notified by the Emperor that whatever language she chose to

Von Seiner

Majestät dem Kaiser von Oesterreich,

Könige von Böhmen u. s. w.

und Apostolischen Könige von Ungarn,

unserem allergnädigsten Herrn

Der

Opernsängerin

Frau

Nelly Melba

Gnaden zugefügen.

Seine kaiserliche und königlich Apostolische Majestät haben mit Allerhöchster Entschließung vom 26. Jänner 1900 Ihnen den Titel einer Kais. & Königl. Sängerin allergnädigst zu verleihen geruht.

Von Ihrem Allerhöchsten Beschlusse werden Sie hiemit in die Kenntniß gesetzt.

Übrigens verbleiben Seine kaiserliche und königlich Apostolische Majestät Ihnen mit kaiserlicher, königlicher und erzherzoglicher Huld und Gnade wohlgewogen.

Gegeben zu Wien, unter Seiner kaiserlichen und königlich Apostolischen Majestät beigedrucktem geheimen Siegel, den sieben und zwanzigsten Monatstag Jänner des eintausend neunhundertsten Jahres.

Seiner k. u. k. Apost. Majestät
Erster Obersthofmeister:

Lichtenstein

IMPERIAL WARRANT OF APPOINTMENT AS COURT SINGER TO H.I.M. THE EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA

sing in would be acceptable—a compliment so cordial in itself that Melba was at once *en rapport* with the Viennese musical world.

The presence of the aged Emperor at "Traviata" was a very special honour, for His Majesty had not attended any public entertainment of a similar character since the tragic death of the Empress. To mark his appreciation of Melba's art, he made her "Chamber Singer to the Imperial Court," and in forwarding the warrant of appointment to this honour expressed his personal admiration and good-will.

In connection with this visit to Vienna, Madame Carreño, the distinguished pianist, lately told a story when visiting Melbourne, the city of Melba's birth. "I was engaged to appear in Vienna, and on my arrival there I found myself down to play in Sinding's quartet, a work which I had not performed for some years. So I set myself to practise it assiduously. Just when I was hard at it a knock came at the door. 'The lady in the adjoining room would feel greatly obliged if you could postpone your practice for a couple of hours, as she has to appear at the opera this evening, and requires to sleep, while if you continue playing she must needs stay awake to listen to you.' 'And, pray, who is the lady?' 'It is Madame Melba.'" Madame Carreño at once acceded to the request, and even sacrificed a little more of her practising time in order to be among the singer's audience that night.

Under a little picture of himself the distinguished master Theodore Leschetizky wrote a graceful tribute to the Australian diva after this performance:

"VIENNA.

"À MADAME NELLIE MELBA,

"Sous l'impression profonde de son interprétation magnifique et délicieuse de la Traviata le 19 Janvier, 1900 ; en pleine admiration pour la grande artiste et la charmante femme.

"THEODORE LESCHETIZKY."

On the return journey Melba sang at a Gewandhaus orchestral concert at Leipzig, with Arthur Nikisch as conductor, and was received with great acclaim, the late King of Saxony coming from Dresden for the occasion, while the musicians and students made her many compliments. Melba's share in the concert was set down for the early part, and in the interval the King sent one of his suite to say that he would be delighted if she would join His Majesty's party in the royal box for the remainder of the programme. When the King stood to receive her and offer his congratulations, he told her that the Emperor of Austria had written to him concerning her. The eyes of the whole audience were turned in their direction, and for the rest of the evening the balance of attention was given to the royal box. The persistent use of opera-glasses directed towards the King and his celebrated guest at length aroused some slight impatience in His Majesty, who said, "They are staring at us as though we were a couple of lions ;" and then he smilingly added : "Well, I suppose we are the lions of this evening."

On resuming her operatic routine at Monte Carlo, she sang in "Traviata," with Tamagno as Alfredo, and Soulacroix as the elder Germont, many people being unable to secure admission. The party of the

Prince of Monaco was so large that several of them had to find accommodation in the fauteuils. Among the audience were many well known in London operatic circles, including the Countess de Grey, the Duchess of Marlborough, Lady Erskine, Countess Miranda, and Mrs. Hwfa Williams. The French visitors endeavoured to persuade Melba to fix on a time for once more appearing in their capital, saying: "It is really time Madame Melba reappeared in Paris, if only to prove that the art of singing is not yet entirely lost." Her enforced absence from the opera through a cold, on two dates subsequently announced, resulted in a silly rumour that she had had a quarrel with the management, and this became so persistent, like so many other canards of operatic affairs, that she was forced to the unusual course of a public contradiction.

One of the most vexatious circumstances of a great singer's life is the persistence with which the irresponsible newspapers of all countries accept misstatements of this kind. No opera season is ever allowed to pass without the principal singers being represented as engaged in violent conflict with their friends, their colleagues, or their managers. The British artist, in the necessary isolation to which Sir Augustus Harris once drew attention, being one who by training and tradition is not prone to the ebullitions said to be second nature to her Continental colleagues, suffers doubly through these mischievous rumours, which are peculiarly distasteful to the generally reserved Anglo-Saxon.

CHAPTER XXVI

"In segno di gratitudine ed ammirazione per il talento, amabilità e simpatia della bella Signora Melba."—ALFREDO PIATTI.

IN 1900, as usual, Melba had a summer residence on the reaches of the Thames, and one of the most welcome of her guests was a young Australian student, Miss Regina Nagel, who possessed a beautiful contralto voice, to the training of which the prima donna devoted herself with ardour. For a concert given at the Royal University Hall, Dublin, on August 28, for the benefit of the Soldiers and Sailors' Help Society, Melba volunteered her services, and at the same time secured an important introduction for her young protégée, who had a place on the programme, to which the Countess of Limerick and Mr. Joseph O'Mara also contributed; the entertainment netting £1,000.

During this visit Melba was the guest of the then Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Cadogan, and the Countess Cadogan, at the Viceregal Lodge, and she joined her hosts in their state visit to the horse-show, an event of peculiar interest to the singer, who is known to ride and drive admirably, and whose love for horses has not even been eradicated by her subsequent enthusiasm for motoring, which she laughingly declares to be her *grande passion*.

She also attended the Leopardstown Races, and such other social functions as were compatible with the term of Court mourning for the Duke of Saxe-Coburg. She thoroughly enjoyed the week in the Irish capital, of which she took away as a souvenir a beautiful screen, designed and embroidered by the Royal Irish School of Art Needlework, and presented to her by the Lord-Lieutenant.

Bitter east winds played havoc with the voices of several of the opera singers during the early part of the season, and it was not until May 21 that Melba was able to make her entrée at Covent Garden, the opera being "La Bohème," with Signor Bonci as Rodolfo. The audience included the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, and the Duke and Duchess of Fife, who were conspicuous by their presence on almost every "Melba night" of that season, during which the cantatrice confined her activities to "Romeo and Juliet" with Saleza, and later with Jean de Reszke; "Faust," "The Barber of Seville," "Lucia di Lammermoor," and 'La Bohème," as already mentioned. She also appeared at a number of private concerts, although her minimum fee for these occasions had now reached what one would assume to be an almost prohibitive rate.

A leading London actor-manager once remarked to Melba: "I can't understand why you like singing Mimi; it is certainly not a star part." "But," said she, with a twinkle in her eye, "you see, I am not an actor-manager."

In order to tour in Holland, Germany, Austria, and Saxony, Melba missed her usual American visit in the winter of 1899-1900, but the following season

found her again in the United States, which she once more explored as far west as the Pacific. "La Bohème" was given at Denver for the first time. Puccini's work was now, through Melba's enthusiasm, well established, and on December 26 there was given at New York what was described by the *Sun* as its first adequate performance in that city. The same authority, after the usual unreserved tribute to her voice, singled out the excellence of her characterization, having in a prior summary directed attention to the increased beauty of her middle register and her added broadness of style. In every centre visited the connoisseurs noticed these same qualities, a recognition very encouraging to one whose full honours never interfere with her endeavour towards more perfect development. Mr. Henry Krehbiel's description of "her fresh May morning voice, full of dewy sparkles, and that exquisitely true intonation which so woos the ear," was now familiar throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Melba had become a "lion" in the land of the eagle. She was fêted and flattered by private and public attentions, and President McKinley, in the strenuous activities of his second election campaign, found time to visit her dressing-room in Chicago to congratulate her and express his good wishes. Mr. McKinley was a man for whom the artificiality of the theatre had no attraction, neither was he given to superficial compliment, and his action could not fail to make a very considerable impression on the singer. His appreciation was representative of the public attitude towards her. One penalty of her popularity was the unremitting attention of the

interviewers, who were constantly seeking fresh stories. Her dread of facing them was well known, and added a certain piquancy to their pursuit of her. The more eagerly she pleaded for privacy, the more surely they responded with increased publicity, almost always confining their imaginary interviews to harmless inventions and humorous absurdities. When her steamer entered Sandy Hook, one enterprising journalist drew himself up on a rope immediately after the pilot, and later, when she declined to be interviewed, he said: "If you won't answer me, I'll fake." "Then fake," said she; and he did, to the extent of a sensational two-column article, which no one could read without a smile.

The revival of "The Huguenots" on January 28, 1901, with Nordica, Jean de Reszke, Plançon, and Melba in the cast, was one of the most interesting productions of the season, which closed on April 29 with a remarkable entertainment given for the benefit of Mr. Maurice Grau, the manager, at which Madame Sarah Bernhardt and Monsieur Coquelin added their assistance to that of the whole band of operatic artists. The crowd was so great that over forty women were removed from the auditorium in a fainting condition during the performance, and the enthusiasm of the evening was extraordinary. Bernhardt, Coquelin, Melba, Nordica, Salignac, Susanne Adams, Edouard de Reszke, Schumann-Heink, Bispham, Susan Strong, Fritzi Scheff, Rose Olitzka, Bauermeister, and Jean de Reszke, were all on the programme. It was a memorable evening, and, as it turned out, Jean de Reszke's farewell to America.

On the opening of the London season Melba adhered to "La Bohème," followed by the Mad

Scene from "Lucia," which double bill had proved the most potent attraction at the Metropolitan Opera-House during the preceding New York season. Her other appearances were made in equally familiar rôles, the selection for the closing night being "Romeo and Juliet." She gave her services for a concert held at Stafford House by the Duchess of Sutherland in aid of the Lifeboat Association, and, at a supper which followed, Her Grace, in announcing the splendid financial result, paid a warm tribute to Melba's ever-ready help. The season was one of unusual social activities, and so many requests for Melba's professional services were made that her agent was obliged to make a public announcement of largely increased fees.

The most brilliant of these musical receptions were those given by Mr. Astor—where Melba's colleagues were Paderewski, Kubelik, and Plançon—by Mr. Alfred de Rothschild, and by Mrs. Ogilvy Haig. She fulfilled one or two provincial engagements in England before proceeding to Scotland, where she spent part of her holiday at Dunrobin Castle as the guest of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland.

A charming impression of another Scottish visit, to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Guthrie, in the Isle of Mull, was embodied in Mrs. Crawshay's little poem :*

TO MADAME MELBA.

A VOICE IN MULL.

Grey tarn set where tall crags tower,
  Lost in lonely rugged height,
On thy darkness floats a flower,
  Chalice-shaped, mysterious, white.

* Published by permission of Mrs. Crawshay.

Low the winds blow, soft and tender,
  Round its purity divine,
Worshipping with wistful wonder
  Lily in so rough a shrine.

Voice of clear and silvery sweetness
  Breaks the silence of the hills.
Mountain streams all check their fleetness,
  Creeping hushed in little rills ;
Trees arrest their ceaseless swinging,
  Island creatures hold their breath ;
While those notes to heaven are winging,
  The very sea lies still as death.

Retaining very pleasant recollections of her stay in Ireland the preceding year, she was easily persuaded to make another visit, and sang with the Belfast Philharmonic Society on October 18, her support on that occasion again including Miss Nagel, her protégée. The whole of the tickets were sold out several days in advance, and the greatest interest was shown in her coming. It was arranged to receive her at the main entrance of the Ulster Hall, but, owing to her distaste for public demonstrations, this plan was altered at the last moment, to the disappointment of the crowd who waited in the vestibule. She was accompanied to the hall by the Duke and Duchess of Abercorn (with whom she enjoyed a week's rest at Barons Court), by the Marchioness of Hamilton, the Ladies Gladys and Alexandra Hamilton, the Marchioness of Dufferin, Lady Hermione Blackwood, and Lord Frederick Hamilton. She also made a holiday visit to Lord and Lady Rossmore, in County Monaghan, before leaving the Emerald Isle.

CHAPTER XXVII

"A great singer, a great woman, guided by a prodigious individuality."—THE RIGHT HON. CECIL RHODES.

PRINCE ALBERT of Monaco was among the audience at the inauguration of the Monte Carlo opera season early in February 1902, when Melba and Caruso began their artistic association—the opera being "La Bohème." The usual encomiums were lavished on her interpretation, which was full of simple art, exquisite, and tender. Prince Charles Ferdinand of Austria, the Grand Duke Michael of Russia and the Countess Torby, and the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg and Monsieur Santos Dumont, were present at this *première*, which was in every sense a great success. A month later the stage adaptation of Berlioz's cantata, "The Damnation of Faust," was revived there, with Melba, Jean de Reszke, and Renaud in the principal parts, which were portrayed with consummate art. This work is one in which Melba took a profound interest, and there could be no doubt as to her gratification over the general verdict, which was well expressed by the *Figaro* critic, who said: "Madame Melba est une délicieuse Marguerite. Elle traduit avec une poésie intense l'héroine touchante de Berlioz. Grande cantatrice, certes, et la plus grande; grande tragédienne aussi, sachant avec une suprême s m-

plicité, presque sans gestes (mais que ces gestes, si sobres, sont expressifs), extérioriser l'âme, faire passer le frisson d'amour et de douleur. C'est d'un art exquis et puissant." During the season "Rigoletto" was also given, with Melba, Caruso, and Renaud, and in their hands the attraction of the performance was remarkable.

After the Riviera, Melba paid a first professional visit to Switzerland, and during the second week of March gave an orchestral concert at Geneva, where, in response to the calls of her delighted audience, she sang extra German songs to her own accompaniment.

At the close of these arduous months of professional activity she returned to Paris, but not for rest, as the attentions of the countless friends she had made during her long term of residence in that city soon engulfed her in a whirl of social excitement. The most brilliant of the functions organized in her honour was the fête given by Madame Bemberg (mother of the composer of "Elaine") in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, whereat the guest of honour sang to the delight of the party, which included the Duchess of Sutherland, the Duchess of Manchester, the Duchesse de Monteagudo, and Baronne de Gunzburg.

Her *rentrée* at Covent Garden on May 14 in "Rigoletto" was further notable for the first appearance in England of Signor Caruso as the Duke, which rôle he had sung with her at Monte Carlo earlier in the year, and in which he, as also Renaud as the Jester, created a splendid impression. The Queen, Princess Victoria, and the Duchess of Fife were the royalties present on the occasion, which had all the attributes of a "Melba night" in brilliancy, crowding, and

enthusiasm. The morrow brought the usual chorus of flattering comment. The King and Queen attended Melba's second appearance, which was in "La Bohème."

Mention of the Sovereign recalls an incident. Madame Susanna Cole, the aged vocalist who had sung at a festival service in Hereford Cathedral at the Coronation of Queen Victoria, had expressed a wish to hear Melba in "Rigoletto," for the gratification of which wish her shattered fortunes allowed no promise. Someone brought the matter under the notice of the Australian prima donna, and she at once placed her box at the disposal of Madame Cole.

In the Royal Academy of that year a life-size portrait of Melba occupied a conspicuous place. It was the work of her countryman Mr. Rupert Bunny, whose career she has followed with interest from his earliest efforts in Paris. Step by step in her own progress she has always found time to keep in touch with the doings of the leading painters, sculptors, and writers, especially those who hail from her native land. She realizes that it is not always easily possible to fulfil the sentimental ambition of becoming a prophet in one's own country, and has been generosity itself in helping many towards that fulfilment. Her portrait bust had already inspired a compatriot to admirable efforts, her purse was enabling another to continue his art studies in Paris, and in the case of Rupert Bunny her friendship availed him to furnish the Royal Academy with one of his best paintings.

At this time there came to London a young Australian art student who had been working in Paris, but whose health had failed under the conditions of vitiated atmosphere and improper food so

familiar to residents in the Latin Quarter. His lungs had become affected, and the doctor he consulted told him that an immediate return to his native land was the only chance of restoring his health. Life had become very sweet to the youth, for the recognition of his extraordinary talent had filled him with dreams of a famous future. The journey to Australia requires considerable money, and he had none ; neither had he any friends at hand who could lend it to him ; and in this plight he sought out Melba, of whose kindness to one of his comrades he already knew. He was entirely unknown to her, but in his desperation he persuaded himself that would not matter, and he was right. She gave him £100 for the journey, and in the most delicate way pretended to regard it as a temporary loan. Then she said : " The steamer sails on Friday. If it will help you to have a sketch of me among your pictures, I shall give you two or three sittings between now and then ;" and in that interval she cheered him with glowing stories of his future, and with many humorous summaries on the quips and cranks she assured him he would develop in the time of his promised affluence. In spite of her kindly intervention, he died three or four years later in Australia. " They told me to come where the telegraph wires are always bright, and Melba made it possible for me to come, but they are not bright enough," was the sad acknowledgment of his closing days.

Throughout this season she gave Sunday afternoon musical parties at her town-house, which, apart from the charm of friendly intercourse, she made serve the extra purpose of introducing promising young students to artists and social patrons likely to help

them on their way. At these parties young Australia was not forgotten, and there, long before the London public had recognized Percy Grainger's gifts, Melba was his sponsor and his herald. No great artist has ever so helped beginners as has Melba, but even the very multiplicity of her favours often adds to her confusion. She makes it a rule to give steady practical help, in whatever form it is most needed, for at least one year, generally two, to whatever novice has successfully appealed for her patronage; but when the time comes for one protégée to retire in favour of another, the occasion is almost always fraught with a certain amount of youthful jealousy and disappointment. Melba contends that after a year or two of "farming" in her hands a student ought to be able to do something to help herself, and, while never losing interest in any such protégée, she endeavours to show the need of self-reliance, lessons which are invariably accepted with a bewildering want of philosophy. In these dilemmas Melba is always well served by her humour and kindly toleration.

As an instance of this one may recall a small but very important concert organized by Melba to help a young singer. Several members of the Royal Family were to be present, all the leading critics were to be there, and the occasion was one that would have given almost any artist a coveted public appearance, and practically she could have had her choice among the whole profession. In consideration of all these circumstances dozens of well-known performers had offered their services. At the last moment one of those chosen was unable to appear through illness, and, as a substitute, Melba mentioned a young musician to whom she had shown many kindnesses,

and who was just beginning to be known. She made the suggestion as a direct compliment to him, for there were many pining to fill the vacant place, and her surprise can be imagined when he intimated, through her secretary, that he would expect his fee. Melba was full of resentment?—no, quite the contrary; not even a shadow of it. On being assured that his message was not a joke, she burst out laughing, and when the opportunity next offered, she had entirely forgotten the unreasonable demand of her young friend, and through the medium of her influence she helped him over another obstacle in his career.

"Not less beneficial than this encouragement of young students, although indirect, has been Melba's influence on the professional status of the English musician," writes Mr. J. A. Fuller-Maitland. "It is not so very long since the reproach of English birth or origin was enough to prejudice the general public against the performer, and, as a natural result, the adoption of foreign names by the average singer has been a standing joke for many years. Some people in the present day might be found to wish that the name of 'Mrs. Armstrong' were as powerful as that of 'Madame Melba' to draw a crowded audience together; but, in spite of this concession to a national weakness which prevailed at the time of her début, Melba has done more than perhaps any other individual to remove the stigma formerly attaching to British subjects as musical performers. In all grades of the musical art the status of our compatriots has now been altered so completely that 'Miss Smith' is just as likely to get engagements as 'Mademoiselle Maréchal Ferrand' would be. English singers and players are now accepted on their merits, and people

do not attach the smallest importance to the name by which they are known. This fine position has been definitely won, and in so far as the credit is due to any one person, that one person is undoubtedly Melba. Since her advent, managers and others, at home and abroad, are no longer afraid to announce the real nationality of their young singers, and the rate at which English performers are rewarded for their exertions is no longer ludicrously beneath the rate at which third-rate Continental performers were formerly paid."

In honour of the approaching Coronation of King Edward, a grand concert—organized by the *Daily Express*—at which Melba sang, was given at the Albert Hall, London, on June 11, in aid of the King's Hospital Fund, and the occasion was made one for a great outburst of patriotism. At half-past eight the sounding of a fanfare on the silver trumpets lent by His Majesty heralded the approach of the Prince and Princess of Wales. On their entering the Royal box the whole audience stood, and the golden voice of Melba rang through the vast building in the first verse of the National Anthem. Madame Clara Butt sang the second verse; then every person in the whole great concourse unfurled a miniature Union Jack, and as the wave of colour moved from floor to ceiling the assembled throng sang the final verse in an ever-increasing tumult of sound that produced a most profound impression.

Another of the record Coronation events of that gay season in which Melba took part was the great charity bazaar, by which about £30,000 ($150,000) was raised in three days. The prima donna was an assistant at a stall presided over by the Countess of

Huntingdon, a sister Australian, and daughter of one of the pioneer squatters, Sir Samuel Wilson.

Among the brilliant private parties at which she sang were those given by Mrs. Bradley Martin in honour of Princess Christian, by Mr. W. W. Astor, and by Mr. Alfred de Rothschild, who again had the privilege of entertaining the Prince of Wales at his beautiful home in Seamore Place. At a dinner which preceded this latter party, Melba sat between Lord Kitchener and General Lucas Meyer, then the guests of a mutual friend, but lately the leaders of opposing armies.

Lord Roberts was also one of the guests on that interesting occasion. Two weeks later poor Meyer died in Holland, mourned as sincerely by his late foes as by the friends who had long known him.

On another evening, when Mr. Alfred de Rothschild was again host to a number of notable people at Seamore Place, Melba was in conversation with the late Right Hon. Cecil Rhodes, who said: "Tell me, madame, is it the art or the applause you like?" "How dare you ask me such a question?" she said quickly, with a candour comparable to his own. Then he seemed for a moment absorbed in a sort of reverie, and said half musingly, without looking at the singer: "I was wrong." Allowing himself another brief pause, he looked straight at Melba, and, in tones as if of a newly-born conviction, added: "Yes, I was wrong. After all, it is the power we like, isn't it?"

She also sang at Dudley House for Mr. J. B. Robinson, and secured the introduction of another protégée, Miss Ada Sassoli, harpist, on a programme which was contributed to by Madame Sarah Bern-

hardt, Mr. Kubelik, Monsieur Coquelin, and Monsieur Plançon. Another unusual private party was that given by Mrs. (now Lady) Cooper in Grosvenor Square, at which Melba and Bernhardt sang and recited the vocal parts of Bemberg's "Ballade du Désespéré." As usual, too, Melba sang frequently at Lady de Grey's charming Sunday gatherings at Coombe, and at a charity concert given by the Duchess of Sutherland at Stafford House

Never was the popularity of the singer more strikingly evidenced than throughout this season, and the concert she organized for Miss Regina Nagel was but another opportunity for the public to show their favour by an overflowing audience and corresponding enthusiasm. At Covent Garden her appearance was a sure signal for a "capacity" house; indeed, on June 13, when "Faust" was staged for the first time that year, a violent rain-storm could not diminish the numbers of her followers, and hundreds of people were turned away from the cheaper parts of the house.

During one of the performances of "Traviata," which was attended by a large number of Australian soldiers who had come to London to take part in the Coronation celebrations, and who had planned a demonstration in honour of their countrywoman, they presented her with a magnificent bouquet to the ribbons of which were attached badges of their different regiments, which had been worn in action during the South African campaign. Coming as it did at a time when she was preparing to pay her first return visit to her native land, the gift was doubly significant and acceptable.

Her name was on everybody's lips, her doings

MELBA AS "MARGUERITE" IN "FAUST"

were discussed with assiduity, and "Melba" stories were so popular that no newspaper could be without one. That told by Mr. G. R. Sims ("Dagonet") as an actual experience will serve as a sample: "I changed my canary's cage from a small to a large one. Although he was as lively as ever, he left off singing. One evening it struck me that Richard Yea and Nay might like to hear a rival artist. So I carried his cage to the electrophone stand, and placed the receiver, or whatever it is called, close against the bars. The famous prima donna was just in the middle of her great scene in 'La Bohème.' The canary stuck up his head, and his little black eyes almost started out of it with astonishment. Then suddenly he burst into a glorious melody. Little did Melba dream that night of triumph that she was singing a duet with my canary."

Than the sway she exercised no better evidence could be adduced in support of Mr. Marion Crawford's claim that "the position of a successful lyric prima donna with regard to other artists and the rest of the world is altogether exceptional, and is not easy to explain . . . . In the popular mind those artists represent something which they themselves do not understand. . . . No other artists enjoy such popularity."

Many a strong head would have lost its perfect balance through similar adulation and attentions, but Melba's common-sense was never demoralized. Before and behind the scenes she was simple, straightforward, reliable, with a hitherto unknown consideration for her stage companions. One of the Covent Garden officials, in commenting on it, said:

"I wish all singers had the intelligence and practical sense that Melba has. She realizes the difficulties of the management, and does not selfishly add to them. Last year, for instance, in the Church Scene in 'Faust,' she had to play the scene at first in front of gauze columns imperfectly set up, and frequent draughts blew the painted edifice over the kneeling Marguerite. Of course she strongly objected, and said it did not tend to intensify the dramatic moment; but after that she sang the scene on the steps of the church instead of close to the columns, whereas any other prima donna would have demanded a new scene to be built and painted during the acts." Her punctuality, her preparedness, have become a byword behind the scenes, where the traditions as to great singers' caprices throw her common-sense into high relief.

When the musical celebrations for the Coronation were being arranged, it was regarded as a felicitous circumstance that Melba, a daughter of the Empire, was available to shed the lustre of her art on an occasion of such great Imperial significance. The King had notified her of his pleasure, and Sir Edward Elgar had also been honoured with His Majesty's command for the composition of a festal ode, in which she would, naturally, be the leading vocalist. Melba was to sing other music at the gala performance which was to celebrate the Coronation, but her part in the new work was naturally anticipated as an item of paramount interest. The sudden and deplorable illness of the Sovereign on the eve of the great ceremony necessitated the abandonment of the gala performance, for which the most elaborate preparations had been made, and for which tickets

had been sold at fabulous prices. Had the gala taken place, however, there would certainly have been considerable disappointment over Melba's share, for it transpired that the Coronation Ode was practically without a solo or any other adequate scope for her gifts. She, of course, would have been delighted to sing any rôle, however insignificant, if by doing so she could emphasize her readiness to honour the King, and everybody who knew the circumstances would have realized that inspiration does not always respond to the personal wishes of even the creative artist himself.

She made her farewell appearance at the opera on July 28, before an audience which included numbers of Australian troopers, who voiced their good wishes in a tumult of applause that made her realize in advance the welcome that awaited her at home.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A Welcome to Melba.*

On Austral shores a light is falling,
  Fast speed the dancing hours,
From tree to tree sweet birds are calling,
  The land is filled with flowers,
To greet the queen of all her daughters:
  Upborne on flying foam
And trackless waste of severing waters,
  She turns her face towards home.

Be calmest, brightest skies above her,
  Bland may the breezes be,
And soft as words of those who love her,
  The deep song of the sea.
Oh, may the sky and sea be mated,
  No errant tempest roam,
To mar the ship so richly freighted
  That brings our singer home.

She comes with crowning laurels on her
  She won on heights of fame;
The world of art, where praise is honour,
  Resounds with Melba's name.
And golden words her peers have spoken,
  The kings and queens of song;
And hers renown that has for token
  The plaudits of the throng.

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* Published by permission of Miss Ethel Castilla.

When Europe laid its rarest flowers
  In homage at her feet,
She missed the wattle's sunny showers,
  Its perfume passing sweet.
She yearns for southern plains unending,
  In murky days and dun,
The azure seas and heavens blending,
  The glory of the sun.

Her heart remembered forest places,
  The musk-tree's fragrant screen,
The train of loved familiar faces,
  The dear days that have been.
Enriched by depths of tender feeling,
  Her voice, untouched by time,
Must touch and thrill us in revealing
  The splendour of her prime.

The singer's triumphs fill with glory
  The land that gave her birth,
And lend enchantment to its story
  For mighty ones of earth.
All hearts go out in proud elation,
  To meet her and enthrone:
The deep devotion of the nation,
  And love, are hers alone.

ETHEL CASTILLA.

MODESTY and simplicity were the primary characteristics of Madame Melba's first departure from the land of her birth, but in her return, after fifteen years' enjoyment of world-wide and undreamt-of fame, there were all the elements necessary to a popular sensation. Two or three times every year since 1889, when her début in Paris had aroused such widespread interest, it was usual to find a rumour in circulation that Melba was about to pay a visit to Australia. The necessary subsequent

denial, extending over so long a term, ultimately led to a Melba visit being regarded as the most unlikely of events, and the improbability of her returning home was embodied with considerable humour in numerous local verses and jokes. In November, 1901, she sent the following cable to the Australian press :

"It gives me very great pleasure to inform you that I have definitely arranged with Mr. George Musgrove to pay a professional visit to Australia next year after the London season. I shall sail from England in August, and give a series of concerts in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Adelaide, during the months of September, October, and November. I believe that on many occasions rumours have been published of my going to sing in my native country, but they have never been authorized by me, as until now the difficulties appertaining to such a venture have proved unsurmountable. Now that these difficulties have been removed, I cannot tell you how delighted I am in looking forward to a visit so full of potential pleasure to myself in the renewal of old friendships with the people among whom I was born and brought up ; and if by the exercise of my art I am able to add some joy to the lives of my countrywomen and countrymen, my happiness will be complete.

"NELLIE MELBA."

Immediately after this news had been made known, hundreds of cables, telegrams, and letters expressive of gratification were sent to Melba ; among them a message from the Prince of Wales,

who, after referring to the indelible memory left by His Royal Highness's own recent welcome to the Commonwealth, assured the prima donna of an enormously appreciative reception in the country of her birth. On August 22 she sailed from Vancouver in the *Miowera*, and was due to arrive at Brisbane early on Sunday, September 14. Neither on that day nor on the two following days was there any news of the vessel, and on the morning of Wednesday, September 17, natural anxiety was greatly increased by a rumour that the *Miowera* was wrecked in Moreton Bay. At two o'clock on that afternoon a reassuring telegram was received from Cape Moreton, but the uncertainty had already been sufficient to intensify the public interest in the coming of Melba, who was safely landed after nine o'clock that evening. In order to make that possible, and save herself and the public any further inconvenience or disappointment, the Commissioner of Health decided to waive the usual regulations, and went down the bay at the earliest possible moment to make his examination and admit the vessel to pratique. With him were a few privileged persons, including the Mayor and Mayoress of Brisbane (Mr. and Mrs. George Corrie), to tender a welcome on behalf of the northern city in which she had been married and spent many happy days before the dreams of a professional career had taken any definite shape. Melba's belief in the Australian people's affection, and her lifelong distaste for public ostentation, made her ask in advance that there should be nothing formal in her welcome home; but she was greatly touched by the action of the Mayor and Mayoress, who had undertaken an un-

comfortable and fatiguing trip in order to give her early assurance of Australia's good-will, and the gift of a bouquet composed of the national flower—wattle blossom—which Mrs. Corrie made on boarding the steamer, filled the singer with manifest delight.

"My native land," she said to a friend who had come from Melbourne, on getting near the crumbling bluff of Moreton Island. "Yes, my country. I bowed to it three times for luck when I first saw it half an hour ago." When she spoke the first words there was sadness in her eyes; when she imitated the curtsey she had made to the island she had already changed to mirth. Next moment her face was grave again, and she continued: "Oh, I do hope the people will like me in Australia! Everybody said I was never in such fine voice as this season in London, and I do hope it will be the same here. I have experienced many emotions, and I have enjoyed many successes, but I know that when I stand on the platform of the Melbourne Town Hall for my first concert I shall feel the greatest emotion of my whole life. I am not nervous in the slightest, yet something rises in my heart, and almost chokes me, when I think of coming back again after all these years to sing to the Melbourne people, and especially to my dear father." Asked for a message to the public, she said: "A message? Am I to send them a message? Well, I am glad to say something to the people of my dearly-loved native land. Tell them I am happy to be back, happy to know they take an interest in me. I shall sing to them from my heart, and it is perhaps well that I should not have to speak, for I should fail to say

even half what I feel. It is a home-coming to me after many years, a home-coming I have looked for and can never forget." She had played cricket and other games on board, and had entered cordially into all the interests of the passengers, who, with the ship's crew, gave her a hearty cheer as she stepped ashore.

Next morning she started for the South. At Toowoomba and Newcastle the Mayors of these towns attended to greet her in passing, and to present flowers; and at Hornsey and all the smaller stations there were crowds to cheer, even when the train did not stop. On arrival at Sydney, where she had to make a temporary break in the journey, there was another demonstration, which was renewed on her departure in the evening. As she neared the city of her birth and her home, the excitement increased; the railway-stations were decorated, and wherever the train stopped flowers were rained upon her. To Albury, about 200 miles from Melbourne, where she was to cross the border into her native state—Victoria—her father, Mr. David Mitchell, had travelled the day before in the state car which the Railway Commissioners had sent to convey the great Victorian home. He had come in pride and affection to welcome his favourite child, who, in the sixteen years since their parting, had placed a twofold value on every step of her success because of the pleasure it would bring to him. They had parted at a moment when London connoisseurs held out no hope of the realization of her dreams; they were to meet at a moment when the realization of these dreams had raised her to a position of unrivalled eminence in operatic art.

The meeting was to be fraught with unspeakable pleasure to both, and in the eager reckoning of Melba the express train moved but at a snail's pace. At length Albury was reached, and in breathless eagerness she rushed to the window for a sight of her father. He was nowhere to be seen, and in a few moments she learned that he had been so affected by his own feelings and the manifestations of popular enthusiasm over her home-coming that he had been seized with paralysis and was seriously ill. Melba, already nerve-strung with fatigue and all the emotional activity incidental to such an occasion, was almost overwhelmed by the news, and had to be supported on the platform. In the midst of her joyous and regal progress, the central figure in a welcome of which any Sovereign might be proud, she was led to the bedside of her stricken father. Such were the conditions under which they met after many and momentous years of separation. Being assured that there was no immediate danger, she was persuaded by her father to continue the journey to Melbourne, as he plaintively pleaded that any disappointment to the public would only retard his recovery. The doctors in attendance also urged this course, and Melba nerved herself for the ordeal, which even under the happiest circumstances would have been trying, but which under the conditions alluded to was extremely harrowing.

Great numbers of people saw the express depart from Albury, and immediately it crossed the Victorian border rounds of cheers intimated to Melba that she had entered her native State. Excitement was now at a high pitch, and all along the line people could be seen waving to the speeding train.

At Wangaratta, Euroa, Benalla, Seymour, and all stations where a stop was made, there were addresses, flowers, cheers, and deputations from public and private bodies, the railway buildings being decorated with flags and greenery as a further manifestation of the people's voluntary tribute to the home-coming celebrity. One of Melba's sisters had joined the party in New South Wales, and the other sisters and brothers boarded the express at Seymour. She had thus met all the immediate members of her own family before reaching Melbourne, where the scene at the Spencer Street station was one of remarkable popular ardour. Although the people fulfilled the letter of Melba's request, that her home-coming should not be made the occasion of any organized demonstration, yet they excusably disregarded the spirit of her petition, and in the fervour of their spontaneous greeting gave her a welcome which could never have been equalled by any formal tribute. The space where her train was to enter was closed to the public ; the issue of tickets of admission was strictly limited ; yet from early morn until one o'clock, when she stepped on to the platform, thousands of people waited in the vicinity of the station.

It was known that she was travelling in the state car, with which the people had become familiar during the journeyings of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and immediately a lady alighted on the platform from this section, some boys on a neighbouring roof called out : "Three cheers for Nellie !" The response notified the crowds outside that she had arrived, and roars of welcome were given long before she came in view of the waiting throng.

"What with policemen vainly endeavouring to keep a clear track to the gates for a carriage, photographers perched up on portable and miniature towers, and thousands of persons good-humouredly hustling one another in a fight to secure the best positions, the enclosure presented a scene of animation only equalled by the reception accorded to the first Governor-General. Admission to the platform was by ticket, but this did not prevent its being filled almost to the point of discomfort. Here were to be seen Lord Richard Nevill, representing His Excellency the acting Governor-General; the Mayor of Melbourne (Sir Samuel Gillott), the Secretary for Railways (Mr. Robert Kent), the Secretary for Defence (Captain Collins, R.N.), and many others. Madame Melba had stepped lightly on to the platform before anyone was aware of the fact, but in an instant she was surrounded by a surging mass of people striving to see and welcome her. Lord Richard Nevill was the first in welcoming the diva on Lord Tennyson's behalf, and Sir Samuel Gillott immediately followed suit for the city, at the same time presenting a very handsome bouquet. Then there were relatives and old friends and new acquaintances pressing forward for a hand-clasp, and all within reasonable distance were not disappointed. Looking the picture of happiness, there was a vivaciousness, a friendliness of expression, in Madame Melba's radiant smile of acknowledgment which immediately ingratiated her in the hearts of those who were displaying their pleasure, perhaps too demonstratively, by impeding her movements. And for friends divided from her by the crowd there was a merry wave of the hand. The hands, how-

MELBA'S ARRIVAL IN HER NATIVE CITY, MELBOURNE, 1902

ever, were soon filled with bouquets, which seemed to spring out of the ground, until Madame Melba could carry no more.

"After the first few seconds spent in satisfying curiosity, cheers burst out within the barrier, and acted like a match to powder in stirring up the crowd outside to loud hurrahs. Nobody evinced any desire to allow her to escape to her carriage. For a few minutes she could not move forward, and her retreat was cut off. Then burly and impassive George Musgrove placed himself on her left hand, and Mr. T. A. Patterson (brother-in-law) on the right, while a sturdy young fellow, fired with the strength of a Sandow for the occasion, led the way, and the little party began to cleave through the crowd. After a short but fierce struggle the carriage in waiting was reached, and Madame Melba took her seat. But where were the rest of the party? Lost in the crowd, and imprisoned for some time. Strong and willing assistance was near, however, and they were rescued one by one and piloted to the gate.

"Meantime the crowd was cheering itself hoarse, and the central figure in this royal reception—the Queen of Song—was bowing continually. To a friend standing by the carriage steps she handed a bunch of violets. "Give us all some," a voice called out amidst a deafening clamour; and, evidently delighted by the suggestion, Madame Melba began to tear up the heaps of flowers that filled the seats of the carriage, and to throw them to all sides. The mêlée that ensued was indescribable. Men almost came to blows in disputing the right to a daffodil, women looked unutterable things at one another

over a few sadly damaged violets, while boys, with a keen eye to business, gathered all they could, and had a brisk market in the sale of 'Melba mementoes.'

"Until the family party was complete, Madame Melba continued despoiling herself of floral offerings, and when doing so she managed to loosen a gold purse of strange and exquisite design which she wore attached to her wrist." It was caught and quickly restored by Mr. Vanderkellen, Vice-Consul for Belgium; the very man who, fourteen years before, in his official capacity, had replied through the Foreign Office that the young Australian singer then opening her career at Brussels was in every way highly worthy of the favour of the Belgian Court, with which it was proposed to honour her in a still greater degree than already shown her by the Royal Family.

"The minute the carriage moved off there was a scramble for flowers which had fallen to the ground and been trampled underfoot. It did not matter that they were utterly destroyed; they would recall the scene, and be envied exhibits in suburban homes. The journey through the city was a triumphal progress. Collins Street and Swanston Street were lined with people, who overflowed the footpaths into the roadway, and the trams were stopped. All the windows were occupied, and the cheering and waving of handkerchiefs recalled the Melbourne of some recent great occasions.* The carriage could only proceed at a snail's pace."

* These great occasions were the celebrations in honour of the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to proclaim the Commonwealth, and those to celebrate the British successes at Ladysmith, Mafeking, etc.

In Collins Street the members of the Stock Exchange came out on the steps, and, waving their hats in the air, raised a cheer that easily rang out above the din in the street. A little farther on, when passing Allan's piano warehouse, where, during the years of her happy girlhood, Melba had often attended for music-lessons, a band played "Home, Sweet Home," and "Auld Lang Syne," the opening bars of which led the people in the streets to renewed outbursts of wildest cheering. Intensely moved, but keeping her feelings under wonderful control, Melba rose in the carriage and bowed over and over again. "Along the St. Kilda Road groups of enthusiastic people cheered the distinguished Melbournian, and in the Toorak Road large numbers of ladies, who had been waiting patiently for hours, gave her most fervid greeting."*

Throughout this unequalled welcome, Melba exhibited really marvellous outward composure, hardly betraying by a tremor of the lip or the moistening of an eye the intense emotion which was rending her very soul. She smiled bravely through it all until she reached Myoora, and there, in the privacy of her own room, the prolonged tension of her moving home-coming was at length relieved by the "fast-flowing current of her easy tears."

The late arrival of the steamer from Vancouver, her father's illness, and the other exhausting conditions of her return, necessitated a postponement of her first concert, a change for which she publicly begged the indulgence of the people, so that she might offer them her artistic best. Through the

* The foregoing description of Melba's arrival is taken from the *Argus*, the great Conservative journal of Australia.

press she had also made acknowledgment of her reception, concluding: "I am indeed happy in finding so many warm-hearted friends on my return to the country which I have been longing for many years to see again." Entertainments in her honour by the Acting Governor-General, Lord Tennyson, and the State Governor, General Sir George Sydenham Clarke, and the Chief Justice of Victoria, Sir John Madden, were the earliest organized; and later the Mayor of Melbourne, Sir Samuel Gillott, gave a brilliant reception for her, at which 2,000 representative citizens fought for the honour of a place near her.

Before Melba had been in Australia many hours it became apparent that the people, in their exuberant generosity, were determined entirely to ignore her oft-repeated request that the impression of her home-coming should not be disturbed by the conventionalities of organized greetings, and receptions, addresses, and fêtes were arranged in bewildering numbers. One of the most interesting of these gatherings was the demonstration by her old school companions at the Presbyterian Ladies' College. The pupils of the day, dressed in pure white, formed themselves into a guard of honour, between whose lines the diva walked to the strains of "See the Conquering Hero comes." The Rev. Dr. Alexander Marshall led the singer to the platform, where she was greeted by the leading divines of the Presbyterian Church. Two golden medallions, set as a cloak-clasp, and representing the badge of the college, were presented to Melba, together with an address which said: "When you left us to go to Europe our hearts and hopes went

with you. Ever since your brilliant début all Australians, and particularly your school chums, have read with pride of your triumphs. We rejoice at the position you have attained in the world of music, and also for the reputation you have earned for Australia as a land of song, as instanced by the numbers who, emulating you, have earned a hearing in the great centres. From these and others who have met you we have heard of your kindness and help, which recalled the same generous spirit that characterized the Nellie Mitchell of the old school-days." Selections from different operas in which she had sung were played throughout the afternoon, and in expressing her thanks, Melba feelingly alluded to the occasion as the happiest day of her life. When she left, the chair she had sat on and the pen she had used were set aside, to be retained as souvenirs by the college.

Another entertainment designed in her honour was a matinée of "Sweet Nell of Old Drury," on September 25, by the favourite Australian actress Miss Nellie Stewart. "Thousands of people," said the *Leader*, "gathered in the vicinity of the Princess's Theatre, in the hope of catching a glimpse of Melba as she alighted from her carriage, while the building itself was packed from floor to ceiling. The crowd in the street cheered when Melba's carriage drew up at the door, and the prima donna bowed her acknowledgments. When she entered the theatre the orchestra played 'Auld Lang Syne,' and the vast audience stood up to greet the world's Queen of Song. Two stage-boxes had been set apart for the use of the distinguished visitor, and she occupied them alternately during the perform-

ance, so as to be visible to all sections of the house. The decorations were of wattle and eucalyptus boughs, in which perched a magpie, the most typical of Australian song-birds. At the close of the performance Melba went behind the scenes to express her thanks and her appreciation. A great crowd was waiting to see her departure, and the demonstrations of some of her admirers were almost embarrassing in their warmth."

CHAPTER XXIX

"She is one of those perplexing people to whom the ordinary standards of criticism do not apply. The critic's 'metewand,' as William Morris would say, is either too long or too short. She is at once the greatest of living artists and no artist at all. As an exponent of vocal art she stands on a pinnacle by herself. She is further removed from all possible rivals than Joachim is among violinists, or Paderewski among pianists. Her only equal in this one thing is Jean de Reszke, and even he is not quite so perfect; even his consummate art is not so entirely free from all trace of effort and premeditation as hers."—ALFRED KALISCH.

Two days later took place the most trying public appearance of Melba's life—her first concert before an Australian audience since she had won universal fame.

Prior to the opening of the box-office for this initial concert people had stood in the street all night so as to secure a good place among the applicants, to whom the plan was opened at nine o'clock in the morning—the prices being augmented to four times the usual highest rates; an increase which was later again advanced, when the front seats for the opera concerts were priced at 3 guineas each.

Nearly three hours before the concert began crowds assembled outside the Town Hall, and it required the assistance of a large body of foot and mounted police to prevent serious interruption of the traffic. Within

the hall the audience, who assembled long before the necessary time, waited in intense eagerness.

When Melba at length appeared, the effect was extraordinary. The whole of the people rose in an instant, and broke into a wild tumult of cheers. Hats, handkerchiefs, and programmes were waved in delirious ardour; women, no less than the men, joined in the roar of welcome, which was renewed again and again in what seemed like a never-ending ovation. Melba stood in the centre of the platform, looking taller than her wont in that hour of exquisite triumph. Save for a single rope of pearls, her person was unadorned by any of her wonderful jewels; none of the orders or medals bestowed on her by the Sovereigns and Institutions of England and Europe sparkled on her breast; she had come before her own people in a gown of classic simplicity, a great yet a pathetic figure in an unforgettable scene. The moments sped and the enthusiasm continued. The smile on her face bore a trace of sadness as she stood there, proud, erect, almost motionless. Then she bowed her head, as though no longer able to face the strain of this emotional ordeal; but the applause, instead of ceasing, rang out with growing vigour. After a few seconds' pause, she made a step forward, raised her hands to her lips, and in an uncontrollable gesture spread her arms out to the impassioned throng. Another and still greater burst of cheering rent the air. Melba now seemed quite overwhelmed by the greeting, and there were many who felt that it would surely be impossible for her to sing. One moment of abandon on her part, and the concert would have been impossible. Then she summoned up all her resolution, realized that it was the moment for

self-effacement, and remembering that any weakness on her part meant the prolonging of her father's illness, she rose with a superb effort to the demands of the occasion, and sang as she had rarely sung before.

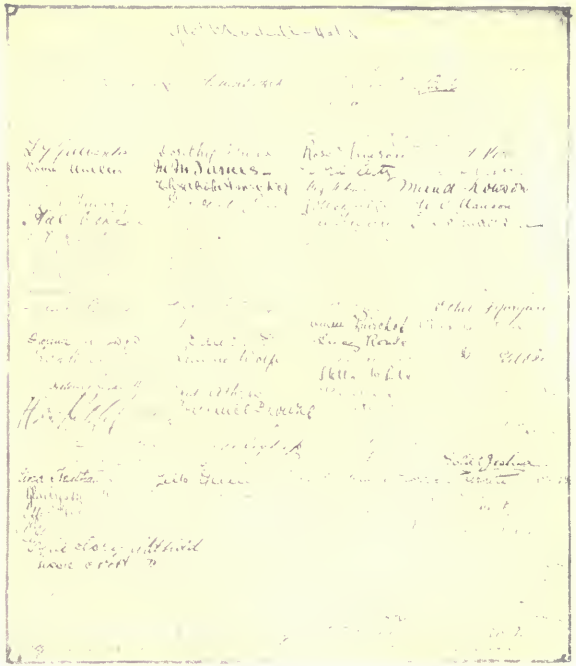
When she had finished, the platform was littered with flowers, and the cheers of the audience were long continued. After many recalls, Melba sat down at the piano and, playing her own accompaniment, sang "Home, Sweet Home." The new meaning of the old song was realized in a remarkable manner by the audience, and the applause that followed had in it something of a great suppressed sob. Such were the circumstances under which Melba, the famous artist, sang in the hall where years before, as an amateur, she had made her first vocal appearance at a charity entertainment. By the date of the second concert her father had sufficiently recovered to attend, and when for her first encore she sang "Comin' thro' the Rye," the old Scottish ballad which it was known he had taught her in childhood, the effect was electrical, and all eyes followed hers to the seat where her happy and honoured parent sat.

For every possible hour of the succeeding days her delighted compatriots arranged receptions and presentations, between which she contrived to pay visits to the leading hospitals, to whose funds she made most generous donations—a proceeding which she repeated in all the other cities. During a visit to the Children's Hospital in Adelaide a little sufferer presented her with a small bead-basket that hung on his cot, and as she could see that he valued it highly she was greatly pleased by the gift, for which she gave him a sovereign in exchange. Two days later she

again drove to the hospital, taking with her some sweets, toys, and a photograph for the boy. He was particularly interested in the picture, and she asked him who it was. "You," he answered. "But who am I?" she questioned, thinking he might not know her name. Instead of the name, the child answered: "The greatest singer in the world"; and as she leant forward to kiss the little patient's face, it was evident that she was deeply touched by the child's spontaneous compliment.

A visit to the Melbourne Conservatorium was one of the functions arranged for early October, and the words spoken by Professor Marshall Hall, the unconventional principal, that day, make in themselves an interesting record.

"Madame, we all of us, professor and students alike, feel that it is very charming of you to pay us a visit in this our little 'Poets' Corner.' You may, perhaps, hardly any longer now understand the singular sensations that pass through us artists, dreaming our dreams in this remote, quiet, isolated nook of the universe, when suddenly, like some northern comet, you flash through our silent heaven, bespattering it with brilliancy—flash, and are gone. You come to us like some fairy princess of legend from the far romantic land of our secret dreams and hopes, redolent with the perfumes of mysterious flowers, shaken from the folds of your gown, yet quivering with the frenzy of distant multitudes, stirred by your art, fraught with fascination and strange power. You represent to us all the possibility, the promise, the glamour of that rich imaginary world which each one secretly in his heart of hearts dreams attainable, if not by him- or her-self,



ADDRESS OF WELCOME FROM THE CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC, MELBOURNE

at least by others more gifted and more lucky. And it is good for us, in this trite, vulgar, prosaic modern world to now and again surrender ourselves to such youthful sweet illusions ; it is good that in the height of success, fame, and triumph you should descend on us—

> 'A lovely apparition, sent
> To be a moment's ornament';

a living image of that ideal phantasm which lurks deep in our souls, and which represents our secret aspirations to all that is free, beautiful, and joyous in life. With romantic delight we regard your royal procession through the city, your military guard of honour at our capitolium, the illuminations and acclamations that greet you everywhere. For to us you represent more than a particular person, charming though we acknowledge that person to be : you represent an idea—nay, the idea to which we have devoted our lives and energies, the idea of art—art, the supreme manifestation of joyous strength. In your triumph art triumphs ; in your honourment art is honoured. Your living presence has compelled this immature, partially cultured, somewhat unintellectual city to dimly feel for a moment the presence of that occult divine power which in higher states of civilization is openly worshipped. And in these few inspired moments of joyous enthusiasm which you have awakened their dulled, unenlightened souls pay homage to, even though they are unable to understand, those subtler, more lasting, more forceful elements of life which become preponderant only in the rare blossoming times of the world's history, which constitute the 'heroic,' and which art—art, the memory of humanity—preserves in everlasting

freshness, to remind us in times of physical and intellectual weariness of the splendid traditions of our race. Was it not in the days of Lodovico Sforza that the conqueror, at the head of his army, rode into Milan, a great general at one bridle rein, a great poet at the other—himself the great intellectual force that knew how, when, and where to utilize both? And you, madame, who come from these historical seats of the ancient splendour, power, and culture of the human race, seem to waft with you something of their aroma, of their beauty, their traditions, in the presence of which even modern, plebeian, democratic Melbourne becomes animated, festive, and joyous. You are to us the ambassadress of that far romantic ideal world of art, of beauty, and of adventurous hope to which we vaguely aspire; as such we offer you what humble welcome we can, and pray your acceptance of this little memorial of our good-will."

Close to the picturesque township of Lilydale is Cave Hill Estate, a property belonging to Melba's father, and in this neighbourhood, as mentioned earlier, the holidays of her childhood were spent. On arrival at Brisbane she was asked if she would visit the old place, and the answer she gave well indicated how it stood in her memory. "Be sure I shall; and I am going to ride a horse bareback, as I did long ago; and I am going to live in my old home, no matter who are now there, and whether they ask me or not." Her visit to this district was one of the most moving of all the demonstrations planned in her honour. She stayed overnight at St. Hubert's, a beautiful wine-growing estate then owned by her father, whose health she called on all the party to drink as they

Photo Sears, Melbourne

MELBA'S RETURN TO LILYDALE, AUSTRALIA, IN 1902

were being shown through the cellars, at the same time giving him a jocular warning not to regale them with any of his unsaleable vintages. Her reckless riding and driving had often terrified the staidest of the local residents when they knew her as a child, and old experiences were vividly recalled when, without any warning, the light-hearted prima donna mounted a dog-cart belonging to her brother, and drove round the carriage-way at a dashing pace. From St. Hubert's to Lilydale, Melba proceeded in a drag. All the houses along the road were decorated, and the entrance to the town was spanned by a triumphal arch. Hundreds of people had gone out along the road to meet her, including the members of the local hunt club and other horsemen, who acted as an escort for the remainder of the route. Horses, carriages, bicycles, and people were all adorned with rosettes and ribbons in blue and gold, the family colours of the diva, whose path was strewn with flowers by school-children wearing sashes also of blue and gold, who subsequently hailed her with a song of welcome as she ascended the steps of the Rotunda, where an address was presented by the President of the Shire (Mr. J. Wallace). At Cave Hill Estate, where Mr. Mitchell gave a monster picnic in honour of his daughter, the employés presented another address, and in the evening, when she made her way to the railway-station, she was escorted thither by a brass band and a torchlight procession, the members of which gave embarrassing demonstration of their unchanged affection for the mischief-loving schoolgirl who had become a world-admired artist. The *Lilydale Express*, in which the account of her welcome was published, appeared in a gala dress,

the paper being of delicate blue and the printing in letters of gold.

In New South Wales the people were no less enthusiastic than in her native Victoria, and the Governor (Admiral Sir Henry Rawson), the members of the Ministry, the Mayor of Sydney (Mr. Thomas Hughes), and the principal artists, all acclaimed her with many compliments, and there was the same routine of fêtes and addresses. In the days of her artistic obscurity perhaps the people of Sydney had been more ready than those of Melbourne to appreciate the young student's talents. On her return they showed their interest by establishing a financial record for the whole world at her third concert, when she received the net sum of £2,350 for her services, and this despite the fact that the entrance barriers at one door had been torn down by a waiting crowd who feared exclusion, and many of whose members were pushed into the hall without the formality of payment.

Up to this time the highest remuneration ever paid to any singer for a single evening's professional contributions was the £2,000 ($10,000) given to Jenny Lind for her first concert in America. The tickets for this latter occasion were sold by public auction, after a term of sensational advertising engineered by that prince of showmen Barnum, who was at that time Madame Lind's manager. When Melba appeared in Sydney, the advertising tactics which Barnum and his early contemporaries had so impudently favoured, and which it was assumed must have been personally distasteful to the reserved Swedish Nightingale, had become hopelessly effete, and the business arrangements for the

Australian singer's concerts were carried out on formal and conservative lines of unassailable dignity. Yet even under these conditions, and in a comparatively small community, the remarkable result just indicated was achieved.

In South Australia and Queensland the now familiar scenes were repeated, the Governors and principal public men associating themselves with the people's unrestrained ardour. Here a characteristic incident may be recalled. The time of Melba's visit was one when the whole of Australia was suffering from the effects of a prolonged drought, and when driving near Oxley, Queensland, one day she saw on a small "selection" (farm) three cows in very poor condition; and on hearing that the owner was in straitened circumstances, she had a quantity of bran and chaff forwarded to him for the half-starved cattle.

Later on, when she more fully realized the hardships which the shortage of water had entailed on thousands of small settlers, Melba decided on a scheme for wider assistance, and in starting a fund with a personal subscription of £200, said: "While travelling through Australia by rail I have seen heartrending proofs of the misery caused by the drought. I have seen with my own eyes the brown, burnt paddocks extending for hundreds of miles, with no vestige of grass left upon them. I have seen starving sheep leaning against the fences, too weak to move, and looking pitifully at the passing train, as if to say: 'Is there no help for us?' I have seen the skeletons of cattle and sheep dotting the paddocks, and the signs of desolation and starvation everywhere. It is simply appalling. . . . I

have read the pathetic accounts of the suffering endured by the settlers in the drought-stricken areas of Victoria, and I felt that I must do something to help them. I decided to appeal to a few of my friends in England and America, who happen to be blest with wealth and influence, and I have to-day despatched messages to about thirty people, most of whom live in London or New York, asking them to send me something for the drought-stricken Australians, whose terrible sufferings I myself have seen." Melba's action and the warm-hearted motive that prompted it were thoroughly appreciated by the public; but at a specially convened meeting of the Council of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce a sufficient number of members responded to formally express disapproval of any appeal being made outside the Commonwealth—a course which, they argued, might damage the credit of Australia. England herself, and other great countries, had on many occasions proudly accepted relief funds from other nations in time of stress due to the ravages of fire or flood, famine or earthquake; but Australia at this moment, as voiced by the quorum in the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, was to rise above —or sink below—the conditions of international brotherhood. This disapproval of Melba's generous initiative forced her to withdraw an appeal which she had believed could not have met with other than universal endorsement, but her retreat was covered with a dignity which enhanced still further her reputation as a great personality. The Premier of the Commonwealth, Sir Edmund Barton, in accepting the view of the Chamber of Commerce, referred to the people's applause of Madame Melba's motive,

which was later discussed in the Victorian Parliament in terms that must have been highly gratifying to the Victorian singer, whose generosity was described in the House as a byword among Australians.

From Australia Melba proceeded to New Zealand, and once again found herself the heroine of a ceaseless round of complimentary activities. The people marked her visit by an unending chain of courtesies and kindnesses, and the magnificent scenery and picturesque native villages made a great impression on the prima donna, who had never before been in "the land of the long white cloud." The most novel greeting extended to her was the welcome at Auckland from the Maori chiefs and people. Clad in elaborate dress, the representatives of all the surrounding *kaingas* assembled before the great singer, and with the intricate preliminaries of their ancient traditions began their acts of homage. From among the tribal leaders the spokesman, in gala costume of flax and feathers, and with many gestures of deference, advanced towards Melba, and in soft-spoken Polynesian assured her of their allegiance and love. He told her she was to them as the sacred *korimako* (bell-bird), whose melodious chime enthralled their demigods in the heavens and inspired their *tohungas* on earth. At suitable intervals during the recital of the felicitation the whole assemblage bent low in an attitude of profound respect, and then, throwing their heads back, broke into a chanting repetition of "Haere-mai! haere-mai!" (Welcome! welcome!). On the conclusion of the chief's formal oration, all the Maoris joined in a wild shout of "Kia-ora-koe! kia-ora-koe!"

(Long life to you! long life to you!), and they laid at Melba's feet a number of curious and beautifully-wrought offerings. These included an ancient nose flute, made from the thigh-bone of a war captive, a small whalebone club, a feather-adorned garment, some unique tapa mats, and a small grotesque figure carved out of pounamo (New Zealand jade), and representing Hei-tiki, the Adam of the Maori people.

As a final honour, the presiding chief hailed Melba as one of their queens, and with much dignity presented her with the feathers of the huia and white heron, the visible indications of the high rank to which the Maoris had been pleased to exalt her. In acknowledgment of her reception into the hearts of their people, one of the natives gravely "rubbed noses" with Melba; and as a finale to the interesting installation, the young men of the party dashed into a weird, impressive measure known as the *haka*, which in former days was a regular part of their war ceremonials.

DEPARTURE OF MELBA FROM DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND

CHAPTER XXX

"'Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux!' Heureux les publics, bien heureux les yeux qui pleureront, alors que Melba chantera cette scène; et j'en conserve une impression inoubliable."—JULES MASSENET (Paris, September 3, 1903).

ON returning to Europe after her regal progress through Australia, Melba's first concern was for her protégée, Miss Ada Sassoli, for whom she arranged a concert at St. James's Hall, crowning her generous interest by singing herself. The introduction proved an invaluable one to the young harpist. The prices had been raised to the extreme concert limit known in London, but, despite this fact, hundreds were unable to obtain admission. The *World*, in commenting on the fact, remarked that Melba alone had the power of stealing away the audience from Covent Garden. The Australians in London marked the evening by attending in a body to welcome her back from their native land, and they presented her with what was described as the most beautiful floral offering ever seen in London, to which was attached a white moiré scroll bearing the names of the donors in letters of gold. It would be superfluous to describe the enthusiasm of the audience on that 24th of June.

Melba was full of Australian reminiscences this

season. On arriving at the first railway-station in Victoria, on her journey home, the earliest salutation she heard was from a man in the crowd, who, recalling her native suburb, called out, "Hello, Nellie! what price Richmond?" a familiarity which won easy laughter from the singer, who was being received with many honours. On another occasion she told how, after a classic number at one of her Australian concerts, someone in the gallery called out: "Don't put on any side, Nellie. Sing us 'Home, Sweet Home.'" "And of course I did as I was told," added Melba, so often described as the most unbending of imperious singers. In showing the many beautiful gifts and addresses presented to her, she dwelt most on a few uncut opals which had been pressed into her hand by a strange woman, and the address of welcome from her father's employés at Cave Hill Estate.

It would be a useless search to find new terms in which to describe Melba's personal and professional successes throughout the season, but they were certainly enhanced by the continued favour of the King and Queen, who "commanded" her to Buckingham Palace for the soirée given on July 6 to the President of the French. Only about a hundred guests were bidden to this exclusive gathering, and from the royal hosts and Monsieur Loubet she received cordial compliments on her singing, King Edward himself presenting her to the head of the French State.

In further commemoration of this visit of the President of the French Republic, a gala performance, by command of the King, was given at Covent Garden on Tuesday, July 7, and Melba once more was honoured with a summons from His Majesty. She

sang in the second act of "Rigoletto" and in the second act of "Romeo and Juliet," between which was given the second act of "Carmen," with Calvé in the title-rôle. The floral decorations were magnificent, but were mainly carried out with artificial flowers, as at the gala performance in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee it had been found that the odour of the natural blossoms rendered the atmosphere painfully oppressive both for artists and audience.

Two days later, Melba herself gave a superb party at her home in Great Cumberland Place, at which she sang the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria" to the violin, harp, and organ accompaniment of Herr Kubelik, Miss Ada Sassoli, and Mr. Landon Ronald. Signor Bonci, Monsieur Plançon, and Miss Muriel Foster were among the others who contributed to the programme. Profusions of pink malmaisons—her favourite flowers—and roses were used in the decoration of the house, and among the gallant men and pretty women who revelled in the musical feast provided by the hostess were Prince Francis of Teck, the Duchess of Devonshire, the Duchess of Abercorn, the Duchess of Marlborough, Mrs. Arthur Wilson and her beautiful daughter Muriel, Lord and Lady Savile, Lady Maud Warrender, the Marquis de Soveral (Portuguese Minister), Lord and Lady Chelsea, Lord Sandwich, Mr. Alfred de Rothschild, Lord Hardwicke, Lady Cynthia Graham, Mrs. Arthur Paget, Lady Lurgan, Sir Richard Bulkeley and Lady Magdalen Bulkeley, Count Albert Mensdorff (the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador), and many other personalities of the day.

Of her performances during the season everything that was possible was said in the way of laudation,

beginning with the performance of "La Bohème," which was honoured by the presence of the King and Queen, and of which the *Times* wrote enthusiastically.

In October 1903, Melba began an extended concert tour of Canada and the United States, on which she took her young protégée, Miss Ada Sassoli, for her first Transatlantic engagements, the other members of the company being Miss Llewela Davies, Mr. Ellison Van Hoos, and Monsieur Charles Gilibert. Although the tour was most enjoyable and successful, it was not marked by anything very eventful. On November 2 she visited St. Louis, then in the midst of activities preliminary to the great Exposition. On being taken to view the grounds, Melba's first comment was: "I like the hills rising above the main buildings on the plain, and the cascades. And I am so glad to see you have not filled up the little valleys and chopped down the old trees. They will add so much to the charm of the Fair." When questioned at the same time as to the production of "Parsifal" at the Metropolitan Opera-House in New York, in defiance of Frau Wagner's wishes, she replied: "I don't care to say much on what is at the moment a vexed question, but I think opposition might be appeased to some extent if 'Parsifal' were performed only on Sunday. It is a truly religious work with a venerable tradition, and certainly should be dealt with only in a spirit of profound respect."

When taking a walk from her private car at the Santa Fé depot in Wichita on the morning following her concert in that city, a lady journalist endeavoured to interview her, and subsequently told how easily the singer evaded all her questions. After many queries had been deftly blocked, the interviewer said:

MELBA AS HÉLÈNE

"Where do you live when not on the road?" "In a house," said Melba gravely; and then the journalist abandoned the task and allowed herself to be interviewed by the singer, who insisted on knowing the size, population, commerce, politics, and surroundings of the city.

Towards the end of the month, her appearance in Philadelphia was seized on by twenty-six Australian students of the University of Pennsylvania to give her assurance of their kind wishes and esteem. She having temporarily deserted her house on wheels for hotel accommodation, they waited on her at the Walton, and, after presenting her with a beautiful bouquet, read a brief address in which reference was made to her recent extraordinary welcome in the land of their common birth. In December she took part in the performance of "The Damnation of Faust" given at Boston to celebrate the centenary of Berlioz, whose conception met with unusually sympathetic treatment at her hands. Three weeks later she closed her season in the same city, when she sang with the incomparable Boston Symphony Orchestra prior to sailing for Monte Carlo, where she was due to create the title-rôle in Saint-Saëns' opera "Hélène."

Before leaving for America, Monsieur Saint-Saëns had told Melba of the opera, that he had written it for her, and hoped she would be able to sing at the *première*. In order to do this, she at once sent to the United States and induced her manager to cancel the latter half of her concert tour, which was to run over January, February, and March, and pledged herself to fill all the engagements during the ensuing season. Her only chance to learn the rôle was while travelling in the train, yet she entered into every detail of

preparation with untiring interest, and after the final rehearsal had the gratification of hearing the distinguished composer say: "Madame Melba ne se contente pas d'être une merveilleuse cantatrice et une admirable artiste dramatique : elle ne joue pas, non ! elle vit l'Hélène que j'ai rêvée. Elle est l'héroine elle-même, toute, avec une force d'expression, avec une charme, que je suis le premier à admirer, mais pas le dernier : car, à coup sûr, elle y remportera un grand succès personnel ; et tous l'admireront comme je fais." Madame Héglon and Monsieur Alvarez took the parts of Pallas and Paris respectively, and after the public production the critics endorsed Monsieur Saint-Saëns' estimate of Melba's work.

During this season at Monte Carlo, Melba resided at a private villa lent her by the Countess of Wilton, and here Saint-Saëns came on numerous occasions to help her with her study of "Hélène." One day when the butler was absent from his post, the door was answered by an untrained odd man, who admitted the composer, but took no steps to announce him. Long after the time at which she had expected Saint-Saëns, she heard someone playing most beautifully, and, going to the drawing-room, she was surprised to find him at the piano. "I'm tired of waiting, so I decided to amuse myself," said he laughingly, as Melba apologized for her servant's shortcomings.

"Great composers," said Melba, "differ very much in their talent for explaining exactly what they had in mind when writing such and such an aria. One of my best characters, Mimi, was interpreted to me by Puccini in Southern Italy, and he then composed 'Madame Butterfly' for me, though events ultimately shaped in such a way that I have not appeared

MELBA IN PRIVATE LIFE

in it yet. Monsieur Saint-Saëns is a born teacher, and in going through 'Hélène' he was most helpful, without checking my own inspiration unduly. Unlike most Frenchmen, he is particularly sincere in his speech, and resembles Marc Antony in calling himself 'a plain blunt man.' I read 'Manon Lescaut' with Monsieur Massenet. You know his setting is like a piece of Dresden china, whereas the same opera by Puccini is passionate in its colouring. Monsieur Massenet is a great teacher and a kind admirer of my work."

CHAPTER XXXI

"One remembers Ben Jonson's phrase concerning 'flight.' Such a flight is Melba's, which seems to embrace the perfect feeling of attempting to ascend the heights, of attempting to descend to the depths, and all the way through of determining that there should be no sort of eccentricity, no sentiment of anything unconfirmed or not fully realized. She makes no unessential effects of sound, she never attempts to make of a song more than the song contains, but she insistently and most determinedly sacrifices every point in her absolute art towards the fulfilment of those great things of which she is so completely and utterly capable."—VERNON BLACKBURN.

FROM the Opera at Monte Carlo, Melba made a quick change to the English provinces, where she was engaged for a concert tour during March. April was spent in Paris, mostly with modistes and milliners for the replenishing of her private and professional wardrobe. Many treasured possessions, including invaluable copies of "Aïda," "Rigoletto," "Faust," "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," and "Lakmé," elaborately marked by the composers Verdi, Gounod, Ambroise Thomas, and Delibes, had been destroyed on the homeward voyage from Boston, owing to the flooding of the *Saxonia's* hold. Later on, an acquaintance happened to commend this steamer to her as being very steady. "You touch a sore point," she said. "Don't mention that steamer to me. My

Photo: Dupont et Cie, Bruxelles

MELBA AS "AIDA"

music, marked by the composers, was all ruined on it through my trunks lying in sea-water in the flooded hold. I lost my Lancret fan and many others, my furs, my theatrical wardrobe, the result of years of trouble, and everything else. The money loss alone was £8,000, for which the company gave me £1,000 compensation. But the greatest loss was outside what money could restore. I cried for ten days, and I remember the big teardrops falling on my chest as I stood to have the new frocks tried on."

In the midst of the rush and worry incidental to this extra demand on her time, she found opportunity and energy to organize personally a Queen's Hall concert, which she carried to a triumphant issue on May 5, in aid of Queen Charlotte's Hospital. Her first volunteer was Madame Milka Ternina, the distinguished Wagnerian singer, whose work exercised great influence over her Australian friend. Very soon afterwards she gave her services at a Stafford House concert in aid of St. Mary's Church, Whitechapel; and only a few days later, once again appeared in the cause of charity at the Lifeboat Saturday Fund concert in the Queen's Hall, which was attended by the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. A feature of this latter programme was a duet from Boito's "Mefistofele," in which the prima donna was effectively joined by the talented amateur, Lady Maud Warrender. In estimating the value of Melba's share in these charities, it should be remembered that, had she given these three concerts for her own benefit, she would probably have netted nearly £2,000; while a single appearance at the Albert Hall would be certain to bring her upwards of £1,000. In order not

to clash with her charitable efforts, she that year, as on many other occasions, declined to give any public concerts herself.

Although she has done so much for public charities, Melba's disposition has always been to help individuals rather than institutions; but this is not the time or place to discuss her private benefactions, which are only known to a small group of trusted friends, who during her lifetime at least are sure to regard her strongly expressed wishes for privacy.

Her first appearance at Covent Garden for the season of 1904 was made in "Romeo and Juliet" on May 10, in the presence of the Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales. There was little fresh to be said about her now familiar vocal efforts, but her increasing advance in dramatic realization caused the *Times* to note "her often remarkable command of tender and pathetic expression," while the *Daily Telegraph* complimented her on the charm and sincerity of her acting.

Her home life was varied during this season by an extended visit from two New Zealand cousins, the Misses Walker, to whose entertainment she devoted unremitting thought. Among the most interesting gatherings at her house were luncheon-parties to her old colleagues Jean and Édouard de Reszke, to Dr. Saint-Saëns, and Signor and Madame Puccini, at which numerous musical and social celebrities were assembled.

The retirement of the de Reszkes from the operatic stage is a matter on which Melba always speaks with infinite regret. "It is sad that the work of such artists should ever close," she says. "I miss them both more than I can say. On and off the stage they

were inspiring. Jean was the best of comrades, as well as the greatest of artists. There will never be another like him. He gave me the greatest artistic emotion of my life at our first performance of "Romeo and Juliet,' and his first appearance in 'Tristan and Isolde' is one of my most glorious memories."

Private concert engagements, social obligations, and her exacting routine at the Opera, still left her with some spare time, and she sought rest in change of occupation, devoting her leisure, as usual, to giving hints and lessons to young singers just entering on their careers. When Miss Elizabeth Parkina was studying in Paris, some of her fellow-students, who did not know of the prima donna's friendship for the young American, said: "Why, she is a second Melba; but of course she will never get a chance while Melba has such power, for their voices are almost alike." Melba heard her at different stages of her studies, was entranced with her voice, and immediately got her a hearing at Covent Garden, where she received a three-years' contract; and when "Hélène" was produced for the first time in England on June 20, Miss Parkina appeared in the rôle of Venus. Monsieur Dalmores and Madame Kirkby Lunn were the Paris and Pallas of the London production. Miss Parkina also sang as Musetta in "La Bohème," and everything that could be done to advance her social and artistic success was done by Melba.

The visit to London, during June, of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, afforded another opportunity to the King and Queen to honour Melba, whom they commanded to Buckingham Palace to sing for their illustrious guest. Their Majesties made the occasion further memorable

for her by conferring on her the Order of Science, Art, and Music, which the Queen pinned on her breast.

They had also paid her the compliment of having brought to the palace the gramophone records of "Caro Nome," "Sweet Bird," "Ah, fors' è lui," and the Mad Scene from "Lucia," which she had made for her father in Australia, and which were not allowed to be sold, although she was afterwards persuaded to permit the sale of later records.

Near the close of July, Melba undertook the distribution of prizes in connection with the annual awards of the Royal Academy of Music, and marked the occasion by herself giving two new prizes, the largest at the institution, £25 each, for five years in succession, to the soprano and contralto students who should show the greatest proficiency in ballad-singing.

Having completed some further provincial engagements, Melba, with her New Zealand cousins, left for a holiday trip on the Continent. None but a constitution of unique vigour could have gone through such a succession of work as she had compassed in the preceding twelve months. Her respite from professional activities was, however, marred by a most unfortunate incident. While driving in Paris, a feeble old man who unexpectedly stepped into the roadway was knocked down and killed by her automobile; the lamentable occurrence reducing Melba to a state of physical prostration. Her chauffeur was exonerated from blame, and such amends as money could make were quickly placed at the disposal of the bereaved family; but Melba's nerves were so shattered by the fatality that she became ill, and cancelled all her social and professional engagements for the ensuing weeks.

CHAPTER XXXII

"If only the angels in heaven sing as Melba does on earth!"—LUDOVIC HALÉVY.

OWING to her enforced departure for America, Melba was unable to enjoy the honour of singing at the royal concert given by the King and Queen at Windsor Castle on November 18, to celebrate the visit to England of the late King Carlos and Queen Amélie of Portugal.

Even during the busy days of preparation incidental to this Transatlantic tour, she found it impossible to free herself from the sad impression left by the lamentable motor accident in Paris, by which a fellow-creature had lost his life; and her health and spirits continued to suffer through brooding over the unhappy event. These conditions were especially apparent to the members of her party on the westward journey to New York, and almost immediately on her arrival in the States she fell a victim to the rigours of an unusually severe winter. By a wonderful effort, and against the imperative injunction of her physicians, she contrived to appear in a single performance ("La Bohème") at the Metropolitan Opera-House, and the next day found her seriously ill with pneumonia and laryngitis. For days she lay in a dangerous state at the Waldorf Astoria, her condition being

such that it was at length decided to cancel the remainder of her engagements, running from December to March. The gravity of this step, especially for her company, for whom she was doubly anxious to make good the dates she had forfeited the previous season in order to repair to Monte Carlo for the production of "Hélène," worried her greatly. Seriously ill, unable to see her friends, obliged to disappoint the public, and compelled, even under the generous conditions with which she always treats her supporting artists, to entail certain disabilities on them, the position was a most trying one for Melba. Christmas was at hand, a season which she always honours with all the old-fashioned customs, but which she must now celebrate on a sick-bed in a public hotel. This circumstance in itself intensified her dejection.

The opportune and cheering presence of her son was probably the means of saving her life; and once the crisis had been passed, she was greatly pleased by the messages of inquiry and good-will that came to her from all parts of the world, and by the remarkably considerate attentions of the American public. Apart from the kindnesses of personal friends, there were countless gifts of exquisite flowers, fruits, and other things from people whom she had never met, who only knew her through the medium of her art. Her buoyant constitution quickly responded to the call for her convalescence, but even before she was in any condition for such an ordeal she announced her intention to resume the tour, although warned to desist, owing to the amount of travelling it would entail. She was not able to fill in her limited number of engagements at the Metropolitan Opera-House, New York, where her single appearance in December

had attracted an overflowing audience; but at the time of her departure from America, at the end of March, she had the satisfaction of completing one of the most successful concert tours of her whole experience.

An interesting incident of this tour was the return of Mademoiselle Elizabeth Parkina to her home, Kansas City, as a professional singer. It was through Melba she had left there, and it was through her—as a member of her company—that she returned. During the closing term of Mademoiselle Parkina's school-days she had sung the duet "Per Valli, per Boschi," with one of her companions; when she next sang it to a Kansas City audience on January 5, 1905, it was with the Queen of Song as a colleague. In addition to this kindness, Melba also played the accompaniment for her protégée's first number, and did everything to make the home-coming memorable for the young singer, who said: "Just think of it! It is only a few years since I first heard her, and that was the deciding point for me. I was up in the gallery when she then sang in this city, and I was immediately overwhelmed with a longing to become a singer myself. I returned home enchanted and despairing, but on the request of a friend she agreed to hear me. She was kindness itself, and whatever success I have made I owe entirely to her. She first made me realize what singing meant, and then she helped me in every way. She has been most gracious and lovely to her protégée, and the Kansas City people, who were ever mad about her singing, now love her for her goodness to me as well. What a home-coming for me! We sang to a ten thousand dollar house, and everything was just sweet."

Before leaving New York, Melba received a cable from the Prince of Wales asking her services for the Union Jack Club concert which he had undertaken to organize. She was naturally honoured and delighted to have any opportunity to show in some degree her appreciation of the endless kindnesses which His Royal Highness and all the members of his house had showered on her throughout her career, and her reply was not only an offer to sing, but her warm assurance of help in every way.

On arrival at Liverpool, newspaper representatives were in waiting to get a word from her, and she made her usual efforts to escape from the ordeal of interviewing. "Our steamer has not been wrecked, as you see; I have not been in any railway accidents; I have had no hairbreadth escapes from murder; and my jewels have not been stolen—no, not even once. At least, they were safe a few minutes ago," she laughed, and continued: "So you see I am a most unsatisfactory prima donna. At Salt Lake City my private car was side-tracked for some time in the yard during shunting operations, and all the while the huge bell on one of the locomotives clanged incessantly. Unable to bear it longer, I looked out of the window, and shook my hand at the driver in charge. 'Give me passes for to-night, and I'll quit ringing,' he said. Of course he got the passes, and I got a little peace. That is the only incident."

Her first appearance for the London season was at the Albert Hall for the Prince's Union Jack Club concert, which His Royal Highness steered to most brilliant success. The King was present with a large party, including His Majesty's brother (the Duke of Connaught), his three sisters (Princess Christian, the

Duchess of Argyll, and Princess Henry of Battenberg), and several of the younger royalties. The Prince and Princess occupied their own box, and the audience included a vast gathering of notable people, considerable attention being given to the team of Australian cricketers who were present as the guests of the royal director. Owing to the illness with which Melba had been stricken in America, there was a note of unusual fervour in the welcome extended to her on her appearance at this entertainment, designed as a tribute to the devotion of the people of His Majesty's dominions beyond the seas, of whom she is the most famous unit. In the interval the Prince of Wales sent for her, and in the most gracious of grateful terms congratulated and thanked the prima donna for her invaluable co-operation, and at the same time she was also honoured by the personal thanks of His Majesty the King.

A few days later she resumed her place at Covent Garden in "Traviata," the brilliancy and size of the audience and the display of diamonds being in accordance with the conditions now accepted as typical of a "Melba night." All the cheaper seats were sold on the day her return was advertised, and stalls were disposed of at a high premium by the West End booking-offices. The Duke and Duchess of Fife and Prince Francis of Teck were among the well-known people present, but the one individual in the throng surest to spur Melba on to her best efforts was Madame Patti, who had herself so often triumphed as Violetta. Mr. E. A. Baughan, in describing again the unique timbre of Melba's voice, and in noticing her ever-growing sense of drama, said after this performance: "Sometimes I wish she would not act at all,

but just sing. In the stress of emotion the shining surface of her voice is broken up and troubled. She is no longer the Melba of the silver voice. So many singers can give us emotion, so few the evenness of Melba's production, an evenness as of perfectly matched pearls."

For the celebration of her birthday on May 19, Melba attended a dinner-party planned in her honour by Lady Molesworth, and then went on to her residence in Great Cumberland Place, where she gave a musical party followed by a dance. The beautiful women who were her guests that evening made a remarkable picture in themselves, for there were present the Duchess of Sutherland, Mrs. Willie James, Mrs. George Cornwallis West, Lady Norris, Mrs. George Keppel, Lady Kilmorey, the Countess de Grey, Lady Colebrooke, and Miss Muriel Wilson.

The musical programme was contributed by Monsieur Gilibert, Mr. Mark Hambourg, and Mischa Elman, a Russian lad then all but unknown in London, whose juvenile appearance in a sailor suit seemed distinctly at variance with the maturity of his art. At the suggestion of Lady de Grey, Melba, who had already sung twice, closed the programme with "Good-Bye," which she sang to the accompaniment of the composer, Signor Tosti, with such feeling and beauty of vocalization that she held the guests spell-bound.

She gave her voice and art in the services of charity on June 5, when she sang at Stafford House for the Cripples' Guild of the Potteries, and the following day she was called to Buckingham Palace to delight by her song the King of Spain, who was then the guest of the King and Queen. The young Sovereign of the

peninsular kingdom expressed himself as enchanted by her singing, and seeking an opportunity to personally thank and compliment her, he asked : " How is it we have not been favoured with a visit ? Why have you never been to Spain ?" " Because, sir, nobody has ever asked me," she smilingly answered. Immediately His Majesty bowed, and in gallant accents said : " Then, madam, I ask you now," an invitation which she assured the young monarch she would speedily accept.

For the gala performance in honour of the King of Spain, Melba, who by this time had well earned the sobriquet of Court Singer, was again commanded by King Edward. Her activity spread itself in many directions, and towards the end of June she assisted in organizing a concert at Lord Spencer's residence to provide a young contralto protégée, Miss Bingham Hall, from Bristol, with funds for a period of Continental tuition.

In her rôle as honorary teacher, Melba had already given invaluable help with suggestions and lessons, and she supplemented these kindnesses by playing the accompaniments at the Spencer House concert, thus helping to insure a handsome monetary balance for Miss Bingham Hall.

Between-while she sang at the usual number of private concerts, receiving from Mr. W. Astor 1,000 guineas for four numbers contributed in the music-room of stately Cliveden. Owing to requests received from all quarters, and especially from teachers and students, who heard in her gramophone records an admirable medium for lessons in phrasing, enunciation, and breathing, Melba had now agreed that these records should be placed on sale,

and in discussing the possibility of passing on the voice from one generation to another, she said: "Only think how extremely interesting it would be for me to be able to go to the British Museum and hear Jenny Lind sing the air from Mozart's 'Il Re Pastore,' with violin accompaniment by Joachim. I frequently sing this number myself to the accompaniment of the famous violinist. He has presented me with the cadenza which he arranged for Jenny Lind, and I always use it."

By July 12 all arrangements were complete for a matinée given on that date at Covent Garden as a complimentary farewell to Mademoiselle Mathilde Bauermeister, who after thirty years' service had decided to retire from the operatic stage, and who had been fortunate in winning the friendship of Melba, who planned the whole entertainment. An immense audience responded to the call of the prima donna, who was able to hand over upwards of £1,200 to the retiring singer. The chief item on the programme of that day was a scene from "Romeo and Juliet," in which the bénéficiaire was associated with Melba and Dalmores, who sang the title-rôles. When the curtain fell on this selection, in which Mademoiselle Bauermeister as the nurse had repeated her familiar success, there was a display of great enthusiasm, and the stage was covered with flowers offered to the heroine of the day. Despite her emotion, Mademoiselle Bauermeister contrived to say: "My dear friends—for surely I may call you so after to-day's kindness—I feel the time has come for me to make room for younger artists, and my tears stop me at the thought of bidding you 'Good-bye.' I have been very happy here for a great

number of years, and in my little way I have always tried to do my best. This tribute of to-day could not have been mine were it not for my generous friend Madame Melba, and I wish you would please call her out." The audience acted on the suggestion, and when Mademoiselle Bauermeister advanced to meet the Australian cantatrice, and, smiling through her grateful tears, grasped the singer's hand, the theatre rang with applause, and many eyes were dim with the sentiment of the hour, not the least affected being Melba.

Speaking later on to a *Daily News* representative, Mademoiselle Bauermeister said: "I can't realize that I shall never again go back to Covent Garden, where I know every inch of the stage, every knot, every nail, in the boards. Then, the thought of my farewell is so stupefying. The theatre was packed, and all gave their services, including my sweet Melba, who got it up. Isn't she wonderful? It isn't only that she has the sweet voice of an angel—she has the heart of an angel, too. She wasn't well, and of course I wrote and told her on no account was she to sing. But she insisted on appearing, and sang divinely. Next day she had to cancel her engagement for the Opera; so you see she sang for me for nothing, and then abstained from singing at a great loss to herself. But that dear woman always thinks first of others. She is so thoughtful. My sister, who lives with me, and watches over my interests like a mother, was in a box at my farewell, and was so overcome by everybody's kindness that she burst into tears. Melba saw her from the stage, and sent someone round with a message telling her not to be such a little fool. My sister said that kept her up better than anything

else could have done. Wasn't it sweet of Melba to think of her? She is one of the best and dearest creatures on earth. And, do you know, I am tremendously proud of a prophecy I uttered about her. Before her London début, and after her first rehearsal, Sir Augustus Harris asked me what I thought of her voice. 'She has gold in her voice,' I answered, 'and she will put gold in your pockets.'" The season closed with "La Bohème," in which a great audience, including Her Majesty the Queen, took leave of the reigning favourite.

Early in August she sang at Blackpool, an engagement she had filled for several seasons partly out of compliment to the conductor, Mr. Landon Ronald, a friend and artistic comrade since the early days of her career. So great was the crowd to hear her that the ordinary traffic arrangements were interrupted some hours before the concert began, and the welcome extended her by the audience exceeded anything previously known there.

At the Blackpool concert, Melba had come on the platform to sing an encore number, and Mr. Ronald played over the opening bars in the original key, which was about four notes too low for the prima donna. She was, of course, unable to proceed, and the accompanist in a meditative mood repeated the introduction without noticing his error. Any average singer would have quietly approached the piano, and in a whisper reminded him of his delinquency; but Melba, fully alive to the humour of the situation—for the song was one of his own compositions—looked at him in amused surprise, and called out in bell-like tones that could be heard clearly in every part of the hall: "My dear sir, you are in the wrong

key; I am not a contralto"—a frank correction which greatly entertained the audience. Recalling his earliest experiences with the prima donna, Mr. Landon Ronald says:

"The first time that I ever met Madame Melba was during the performance of 'Faust' at Covent Garden Theatre, when I was fulfilling the duties of *maestro al piano* in 1891.

"On the night following I was told that the great singer required someone to come to her hotel to study Massenet's opera 'Manon' with her, and that I was to be there at ten o'clock in the morning. I had never heard this work, nor did I know a note of the music; but, having obtained a copy of the vocal score, I sat up all night to study it. I arrived at Madame Melba's apartment at ten next morning, knowing the work practically by heart. I had scarcely rehearsed a half-hour with her before she very kindly became enthusiastic, and as I left her she said: 'Remember that from now you are Melba's accompanist everywhere.' From that day to this, no one else has ever played for her in public or in private, excepting on the rare occasions when I have been unable to do so.

"Her splendid friendship for me from the outset of my career helped me in a manner which it is impossible for me to describe, and remains to-day one of my most treasured possessions."

On October 5 she was back at Covent Garden for the autumn season, opening in "La Bohème," which was interesting for the introduction of a new Musetta, Signorina Emma Trentini, a *petite* Italian who at once became a protégée of Melba's and a favourite with the public. The conductor of the evening,

Signor Mugnone, also made a most favourable impression. The Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince Alexander of Teck, and many other distinguished people, were among the audience. Considerably reduced rates of tariff prevailed on all except "Melba nights," but for her appearances the prices were the same as during the summer season; indeed, in the case of the back rows of the amphitheatre they were still higher. Yet, in spite of this, so many were unable to gain admission that the same bill had to be repeated a couple of nights later. It was well known that if Melba had consulted her personal wishes she would not have sung during this autumn Opera term, but she felt that her fullest and friendliest co-operation was due to the public and the management in their endeavour to make grand opera a permanent institution in London.

Between her appearances in opera, one of the engagements Melba fulfilled was at the Bristol Festival in October, during which she was the guest of the Duke and Duchess of Beaufort at Badminton. The rates of admission had been raised for the only evening of her appearance, but hundreds were disappointed, as the great hall was not large enough to accommodate all who wanted to hear her, and the whole of the tickets were sold before the festival opened.

By command of the King, Melba sang at Windsor Castle on November 17, at the party given by His Majesty and the Queen in honour of the King and Queen of Greece and Prince and Princess Nicholas of Greece. A few days later, Queen Alexandra took her illustrious guests to hear the Australian prima donna in "Faust," which she then for the first time in England sang in the Italian tongue.

Notwithstanding her many engagements, she found time to organize an entertainment at Covent Garden in aid of the families rendered destitute by the earthquake in Calabria. Although circumstances compelled her to give the concert on a Sunday evening—November 19—her influence and popularity were sufficient to pack the house, the Italian and Russian Ambassadors being among the notables present, and she was enabled to remit £1,000 to the stricken families.

Distress, with numerous indications of still harder conditions pending, was apparent among the poorest of the East End workers even in the early autumn, and Melba showed her sympathy with the destitute of her own race by arranging to give a concert on their behalf. Before the preliminaries were far advanced, the opening of the Queen's Fund for the same purpose was announced; so Melba abandoned the concert scheme, and sent instead a donation—£600—to the relief treasury which Her Majesty had so magnanimously inaugurated.

She also crowded into the autumn another concert tour with Mr. Percy Harrison, and early in December returned to Bristol, where she sang at a performance initiated by the Duchess of Beaufort for the Lifeboat Saturday Fund. Gounod's "Faust" was drawn on for the programme, and Mr. Charles Manners was the Mephistopheles of the occasion.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"La divine Melba."—Pablo de Sarasate.

Early in 1906, Melba paid a visit to Spain, and one of the first compliments she received was an invitation from His Majesty King Alfonso to attend the wedding of his sister, Her Royal Highness the Infanta Maria Teresa. Wherever she went she was greeted with the greatest cordiality by the people, and at Malaga, where she made a holiday sojourn of some weeks, every conceivable compliment was devised in her honour. A bull-fight was improvised for her entertainment, but not before the prima donna had exacted a promise that there should be no gore in the exhibition. These conditions were faithfully carried out, and Melba expressed herself as sure that no ordinary contest could have been half so interesting as the bloodless fight planned for her benefit. The air of this picturesque resort had a most recuperative effect on her health, and she was able to enter into all the amusements of the place, to the delight of the residents. Before leaving Malaga she elected to give a charity concert there, a decision which greatly impressed the people of the town. For days prior to this event there was much excitement over Melba's expected appearance, and on the evening of the concert unusual homage was paid her. A carpet woven

out of trailing foliage, in which gorgeous blooms were effectively intertwined, was spread for her to walk on from her carriage to the hall—a compliment usually reserved for the Royal Family—and within the building the decorations were remarkable. Over two hundred families had assisted in the organization of the concert, and in the audience they sat with as many bouquets, which at an appropriate moment they hurled at her feet, until the stage looked like a great floral embankment. Garlands of flowers were stretched from the orchestra to the gallery, where a number of white doves were released from floral cages, and then in graceful flight circled through the auditorium before eventually flying on to the stage, where one of them perched on Melba's shoulder, to the manifest gratification of those present.

On coming to London in early May, she heard that the distinguished centenarian Manuel Garcia, to whom the singing world owes so much, was in weaker health, and, thinking it might cheer him, she offered to call and sing for him at his home in Cricklewood. In his own still clear handwriting he replied :

"MADAME,

"If it will be agreeable to you to come here on Sunday, I shall be honoured by receiving you. I look upon your offer to sing for me as a special favour. I should have wished to be at the piano to accompany you, but that is impossible. Will you therefore arrange about that ? Believe, madame, in the respectful homage of your servant,

"M. GARCIA."

For June, July, and August, Melba made her summer residence at Coombe Cottage, Kingston Hill,

which she rented for this term from Lord and Lady Charles Beresford. The house itself, which was built by the Glynn family, had many interesting associations. The Empress Eugénie once occupied it, and during her tenancy entertained there the late Queen Victoria; and within its walls the Glynns and Mills, the Barings and Rothschilds, have often settled some great financial coup. The interesting history of the building was not the least of its charms for the prima donna. It was rather an odd circumstance, too, that her then landlord should be the gallant Admiral who in 1887 had been the spokesman for the small coterie of musical enthusiasts who induced Augustus Harris to enter on the operatic enterprise of which she ultimately became the leading figure; and also that Lady Charles had been present at her Covent Garden début.

During her residence at the cottage, one of her favourite walks was to the point where, according to local tradition, King Henry VIII. had watched impatiently for the hoisting of the flag which was to tell him that Anne Boleyn had been beheaded on Tower Hill. Whenever Melba allows herself to drift into a sceptical mood, she always bases her doubts on what she considers the apparent injustice of human affairs—the weight of the yoke too often placed round the necks of those whose burden should be of the lightest, according to poor human estimate.

During one of these discussions a visitor expressed her belief that heaven meant the conferring on the individual of the right to spend the hereafter in the period and the character of his or her choice. The prima donna, who has always taken a great interest in the tragedy of Anne Boleyn, interjected: "Well, I shall elect to live in the time of Henry VIII., and

I shall champion the cause of poor Anne, for Henry was a fiend." Then, pondering for a moment or two, the earnest look on her face gave way to a smile of humour, and she added: "No, that won't be my selection, after all. I should prefer to live in the time of Louis XV., and, let me see, who would I like to be? Yes, I shall be the King, Louis himself."

Old records show that in London the third week of May is almost invariably accompanied by blighting east winds, and so it generally happens that Melba has a distressing cold on the anniversary of her birthday, May 19. The usual conditions asserted themselves in 1906, and she was recovering from one of these attacks when she had another disagreeable experience. She was announced to sing in "Rigoletto" at Covent Garden, and, in accordance with her usual custom, left Coombe Cottage in her automobile for the opera-house. Before she had proceeded far the vehicle broke down in a quiet country lane that leads to New Malden village. Every minute was of value. No conveyance was in sight, and no residence near enough to be of any use in the trying situation. Melba, whose punctuality is one of her strong points, was soon allowing her imagination to portray all the difficulties which her unaccountable absence would create at Covent Garden, and would even have welcomed the protection of any tramp, so that her chauffeur might be free to go in search of assistance. After what seemed an interminable wait, a local butcher's cart came in sight, and she hailed it as though it were a modern Pharaoh's chariot. After brief preliminaries, the driver agreed to take her to the Malden Station, whence she could travel by train to London, and it was only when he received a

sovereign for his trouble that he inquired as to the identity of his fare. The drive on the exposed seat of the butcher's cart, and in raiment not selected for outside excursions, renewed Melba's cold, and as a reward for her plucky effort to keep faith with the public she was unable to sing at Covent Garden during the following two weeks. Reference to the diva's punctuality recalls a little anecdote concerning Madame Bemberg. The prima donna is a frequent guest at the home of Madame Bemberg in Paris, where the hostess once deftly turned a joke on a late-comer against the punctual Melba by explaining that, to avoid a contretemps in her case, she always named half an hour ahead of time to her, or else the prima donna would arrive in time to do the lighting up.

A splendid physique, which an eminent New York doctor declared to be more perfect than that of any other woman patient he had ever had, gives Melba unusual powers of recuperation, and before the season was far advanced she was singing with greater beauty of tone, greater facility, than ever before in her life. On July 7, when "Traviata" was given for the first time that season, even the critics and other connoisseurs entirely familiar with her best work described her singing as a revelation. The scene of enthusiasm after the first act was one almost unprecedented at Covent Garden, and the criticisms of the opera were an emphatic endorsement of the people's opinion as voiced in the great ovation. The *Times*, in its notice of the "brilliant performance," said: "In spite of its familiarity, Madame Melba's Violetta always takes us by surprise every time we hear it. For it is surprising as well as refreshing to hear *coloratura* sung nowadays as she sings it; it all comes pouring out

with amazing spontaneity and that splendid sense of enjoyment which makes one feel that here, at any rate, *coloratura* is not an artificial product forced by the singing-teacher for the mere caprice of the operatic composer, but the natural expression of the person who is singing. Madame Melba is, in fact, the link that connects the twentieth century with the golden age of singing."

The following week she created equal surprise by the increased beauty of her always beautiful Marguerite, the force of her acting in the death-scene of Valentine creating a profound impression on an audience already enchanted by the dawn-like freshness of her voice and its *émission insolente.* Opera circles were delighted over the ever-growing success of their favourite, and her new powers were on one occasion being discussed by a number of well-known amateurs, when Dr. Milsom Rees, the eminent throat specialist, said : " I at least am not surprised, and I shall look for greater perfection in her singing for a long time to come. The formation of the throat is as magnificent as ever, and the vocal cords are in a better condition than I have ever seen them. As long as Madame Melba keeps in good health, so long will her vocal conditions remain as at present, if not even in an improved state for the next ten years."

But perhaps no opinion given to the public during the year could have been more interesting than that contributed to the children's page of a weekly journal by Hilda May Campbell, the little daughter of the brilliant pastor of the City Temple, who said : " When I am grown up, when that far-distant day arrives, I want above all things to be a singer. Singing to me is just the loveliest thing in the world. I went some

time ago to hear Madame Melba. I think she is superb. She was singing in 'La Bohème.' My seat was far away back in the opera-house. The stage was such a long way off that it looked like an animated picture; but when the beautiful strains of her exquisite voice floated across the vast space, one felt very near to everything sweet and good and beautiful."

At the height of the season one of Melba's old women pensioners set out from Hammersmith with the intention of walking to the singer's home near the Marble Arch. At Hyde Park Corner her energy gave out, and she went inside the park railings, and remained there for nearly three hours, in the belief, as she afterwards related, that she would surely see her benefactor drive by. She was doomed to disappointment, and after her long vigil was enabled to get home in a 'bus through the kindness of a stranger. When Melba subsequently heard the old woman describe her struggle and her disappointment, she said: "You poor old silly! why didn't you let me know, and I'd have sent my motor for you?"

Another incident of this season relates to an elderly Scotchwoman who one day called with her daughter, who was engaged in some business in the City, but who was believed to have a voice of uncommon beauty. Melba, whose interest in lovely voices and their development amounts almost to a passion, received the callers with her usual kindness. "What is the quality of your voice?" she asked, and both replied timidly: "Mezzo-soprano, I think." Melba sat down at the piano and ran through some suitable scales; then, finding the girl's voice responsive, she played higher and higher, until she found

the novice singing the top D with a purity and ease comparable with her own. A song or two were tried, with the same result. Jumping up in assumed gravity, the diva exclaimed to a friend who was present: "Ah ha! at last I have found my hated rival." Then, turning to the girl, she said: "Why, you have a most wonderful voice. You must begin to study at once. You have music, temperament, intelligence, everything necessary for a great career. You must go abroad." The mother interrupted: "We have no means, and I am sure her father would not like that." "Oh, we'll get the means somehow," Melba replied. "She must go. Tell her father I said so." And then the woman, to whom Melba had already explained that they had the common tie of Scottish nationality, mildly responded: "But I don't think he would know who you are, ma'am." "More shame to him," laughed Melba, "and I a Scotchwoman, too!" But the father proved obdurate, anyhow, and the girl, who might have become a famous singer, continues at the quieter, perhaps happier, vocation of "something in the City."

On the last night of the season it is not unusual for the audience and the artists to manifest an exuberant unconventionality, such as they would not dream of showing on ordinary occasions. "La Bohème" was set down for the final performance of this particular season, and among the occupants of the front stalls was Paolo Tosti, who had provided himself with an elaborate false moustache, which he stuck on his lip and waggled from side to side with grotesque effect whenever the business of the scene compelled Melba to turn her head in his direction. This trick of Tosti's made it difficult for the prima donna to maintain the

pathetic note in the portrayal of Mimi, especially in the Death Scene—a difficulty greatly intensified when Enrico Caruso, while looking the picture of great mental anguish, contrived to pour into her ear exclamations and jokes of the most mirth-provoking character. Caruso's love of fun never deserts him, and since the days of their first artistic association at Monte Carlo, Melba, who has unbounded admiration for his beautiful voice, has always found him a genial comrade.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"Que célébrer en vous? La beauté, la voix, l'âme? Toutes les trois ensemble en adorant la femme."—JULES BARBIER.

THE protégée whom Melba introduced to the London public during 1906 was Miss Irene Ainsley, a young contralto from New Zealand, possessed of a remarkably beautiful voice, for whom her patron gave a successful concert at the Bechstein Hall on July 10, in the presence of the Prince and Princess of Wales. The date was altered from July 3 by desire of their Royal Highnesses, who, owing to their absence in Norway at the coronation of the newly-proclaimed King, were away from England during the earlier days of the month. Numbers of notable people attended the concert, and hundreds of disappointed applicants were unable to secure admission. The whole of the assisting artists were musicians who had been greatly encouraged in their progress by Melba, and the occasion was also interesting through the public appearance of Melba in the rôle of accompanist.

It was generally remarked that when she came on with her protégée, she entered not with the swish and *élan* that might be expected from the reigning Queen of Song, but with a degree of modesty, a measure of self-effacement, that even the most retiring

of professional accompanists could not easily exceed. All the time she was on the platform she, with admirable grace, preserved this detached attitude as the assistant, not the star of the occasion. Among the audience was Madame Mathilde Marchesi, the distinguished teacher who had so greatly helped Melba at the beginning of her career; and during the interval the prima donna presented to the Prince and Princess of Wales the veteran professor, who a few days later received from the King and Queen the Order of Science, Art, and Music. The graciousness of the Royal Family to Melba was still further evidenced later in July, when the Prince and Princess of Wales, in addition to summoning her to Marlborough House, also honoured her protégée, Miss Ainsley, by a request to sing, and at the supper which followed the concert assigned a place "in the presence" to the young New Zealander.

The circumstances under which Melba evinced such particular interest in Miss Ainsley throw an interesting side-light on the prima donna's character. The young student, whom Melba had heard in beautiful and distant Auckland, encountered the usual difficulties in getting a London hearing, and in her extremity was forced to seek a music-hall appearance, a form of entertainment which inexperience led her to regard with horror, but for which she was offered an engagement. On a grey winter day, when life seemed duller than the leaden skies, Miss Ainsley, discouraged and sad, called at Great Cumberland Place, taking with her the music-hall contract, which was as yet unsigned. It was the birthday anniversary of a dead friend to whom Melba had been devoted, and whose memory was vividly recalled by

the expression on the New Zealand girl's face. No further argument was necessary to plead Miss Ainsley's cause. Melba threw the contract into the fire, and within twenty-four hours had completed all arrangements for a term of foreign study, during which the student's every want was provided for with the same completeness as at her subsequent brilliant introduction to the London public.

It was not only in music that her protégés flourished that season. Mr. A. MacPatterson, in whose studies she had taken a deep practical interest during the preceding three years, held an exhibition of pictures in Brussels with quite unusual success; while the odd specimens of his work which had found their way to London had also been highly praised by English connoisseurs—circumstances of very natural gratification to her, since she was the first to detect the young painter's exceptional gifts. She was also proud to enrol herself among the admirers of another countryman, Mr. Charles Ritchie, who had deserted the profession of law in favour of the palette, and whose coloured drawings were an interesting little feature in the Royal Academy exhibition. The principal of these pictures she purchased from Mr. Ritchie, and further commissioned him to make a portrait drawing of her son. The appeal of pictures is no new development with Melba, for as a schoolgirl she took a sincere interest in all such matters, and at the age of fourteen painted several Bush scenes which show more than average promise of artistic understanding. Her known ambition is to become the owner of a fine collection of pictures.

Even such exceptional encouragement to other singers as Melba has ever gladly given has not en-

tirely sufficed to save her from the strictures of the unthinking. In every large city there are always a number of not wholly competent singers who ascribe their limited success to the machinations of the *prima donna assoluta*, whose dominating influence, they allege, has unfairly prevented their ousting her from a position for which their greater gifts more fully qualify them. Melba's experience is not different from that of her great predecessors—indeed, misrepresentation has had excessive licence in her case—but her retaliation does not run on the usual lines. One Sunday in the summer of this year (1906), Melba was to have sung at the private residence of a distinguished lady, whose guests were to include two very illustrious personages. On Saturday—the day before—the prima donna found herself so affected by a cold that she had to abandon the opportunity, which she had been anticipating with loyal pleasure. When asked to suggest a deputy, she named one of the very singers who had often attributed the non-realization of her fullest ambition to Melba's interference. As a matter of fact, the only notice the prima donna had ever taken of the other lady's existence was to offer her at the outset the benefit of her experience and influence. Melba's accompanist saw the lesser-known singer through the ordeal of the hastily arranged private séance, and she never allowed herself to be known as the powerful friend who had secured what would otherwise have been an impossible honour for the vocalist who, primed by foolish advice, had always regarded the prima donna as her enemy.

For the second time under the new régime, Melba lent her art to the support of the autumn season of

Covent Garden Opera this year, and she sang throughout with her accustomed success. The inability of the management to produce "Otello," owing to the defection of a too timid tenor who had been brought specially to England for the title-rôle, was, however, a great disappointment to the prima donna, who had early prepared herself, and whose announced appearance as Desdemona, after several years' interval, had aroused the widest interest. The night originally fixed for the deferred production was, however, robbed of some of its disappointing associations through her being commanded to Windsor Castle for that evening to sing before the newly-arrived King and Queen of Norway. As Princess Maud of Wales and Prince Charles of Denmark, their Majesties had long been familiar with Melba, to whom during this visit they sent autographed pictures of themselves, set in silver frames.

One of the offices she filled during this season was that of president of the committee for the complimentary matinée to Madame Emily Soldene, who on November 13 took a final leave of her faithful public amid scenes of great enthusiasm, in which the diva heartily joined.

For the poor of the Rev. Arthur Crawley's parish in Stepney Green there was an unusually good concert the same day, and if a stray West End resident had looked in that evening he would have found Melba directing the proceedings with an energy and enthusiasm which she had rarely exceeded at any Mayfair function. Yet this was an entertainment of which the East End knew little, while the West End knew nothing. Before the concert was over, many of the poor among the audience and around the

building had heard that the cheerful stage-manager, the accompanist and general-utility assistant, was the great Melba, so they cheered her with ardour, and when she left crowded about her motor and called: "Come back again soon!"

The close of the autumn season found her still in possession of undiminished energy, and she at once began a series of concert engagements in the chief provincial cities, among them Plymouth, where she had never before sung, and where accordingly her coming was an event of unusual interest. When she left London by the 10.30 express on the morning of the concert, many people had already assembled round the Guildhall, and early in the afternoon the double queue of waiting enthusiasts extended from the doors in Guildhall Square to the boundary wall in Westwell Street.

During the train journey she was so full of fun that one of her companions, in expressing admiring astonishment, declared himself a pessimist.

"I dislike pessimism in every form. Naturally, there are serious days in all our lives, and I have had many; but one must take the good with the bad, and give the good most prominence. A sense of humour is the greatest help, and the man or woman without it is to be pitied. I think almost every great artist is a humorist. Take Jean de Reszke, whose powers of mimicry used to convulse the lot of us when travelling together; Tosti, the most skilful of raconteurs; Bemberg, whose surprising antics compelled incessant laughter; and Caruso, urged on by Scotti to caricatures and comments that would drag a smile from a stone. These are but a few of the most intimate instances that come quickest to my mind."

MELBA AND HER SON, MR. GEORGE ARMSTRONG

On arrival at Plymouth she was formally welcomed by the Mayor and Mayoress and other representative citizens. A special force of police was told off to regulate the crowds assembled in her honour, and the *Western Morning News* significantly reported next day that nearly all the men on duty had qualified in the ambulance classes, but that their admirable direction had saved the possibility of accident. At the concert her reception was tumultuous, and as a finale to the day's excitement, Admiral Sir Lewis and the late Lady Beaumont gave a supper-party at Admiralty House in her honour. In the words of an old resident, "The only time to compare with it was when Gladstone visited Plymouth, and even that did not equal the present occasion." In the other cities the same record of success was established; the enthusiasm at Birmingham being greater, according to local wiseacres, than that shown on the occasion of Rubinstein's memorable visit.

The last days of 1906 supplied an interesting family event in the marriage of Melba's only child, George Nesbitt Armstrong, to Miss Ruby Otway, daughter of Colonel Jocelyn Otway. The head of the young bridegroom's family, Sir Andrew Harvey Armstrong, Bart., was in his place to support Melba, and the numbers of distinguished people who attended the ceremony, and the unusually beautiful gifts which they sent to her son, could only be interpreted as a striking compliment to the singer herself. A New York musical journal, in writing of the event, said: "She is a woman who must be credited with more than usual talents entirely outside of her musical gifts. See what she has accomplished with the choicest elements of European society, and from this

alone it must be deduced that her personality, her mode of life, and her own attractions as a woman of the world were the chief media through which her elevation was attained. How many women are there to-day who can boast of having a son who, as such, and merely as such—for he is too young to have impressed himself with sufficient force—can receive the attention of these notable people? Melba did this herself through the force and conviction of her own character and talents. . . . Every musical person should take an interest in this social triumph of Melba; it is a direct compliment to the whole musical profession."

For her son's honeymoon the Right Hon. Colonel Stuart-Wortley lent Highcliffe Castle, the stately Hampshire home where King Edward was a guest in 1904, and the King of Spain in 1906, and where, too, the German Emperor spent two weeks' restful holiday in the late autumn of 1907.

On the morning of her departure for America, there stood among the well-known people who assembled at Euston to say "Good-bye" a quiet, modestly dressed woman with tear-stained face, who every now and then received a kind word or glance from the departing singer. The weeping stranger was "Caroline," a faithful maid of many years' service, who had retired on her marriage, but had come all the way from Paris to take leave of her former mistress. Many similar instances could be cited of the devotion which Melba, in spite of a reserve which an inferior might be expected to regard as impenetrable, wins from her servants even as from her friends. No birthday ever passes without remembrance by men and women who serve, or have served, in her *ménage;*

and in this connection may be recalled the sad death, during the Australian visit of 1902-3, of a personal maid whom Melba sincerely mourned. The family of the dead girl well knew Melba's constant kindness, and a sister has ever since shown touching recollection of it by being among the first to leave a message of goodwill and flowers with the singer on the morning of her birthday.

On the same day that the former servant came to say "Good-bye," there also stood around Melba's saloon the gentleman who had acted as her accompanist for over fifteen years, the lady who had been her private secretary for a similar period, and nearly a dozen notable people who had attended her début in London, and who had remained her devoted friends throughout the intervening years — simple circumstances in themselves, yet speaking with eloquence as to the qualities of the woman who inspired them.

CHAPTER XXXV

"When a thing is supreme, it differs in more than quality from all lesser things; being perfect, it differs from the imperfect, not in degree, but in kind. To one who had not heard Madame Melba for many years, her singing in 'Rigoletto' last night at the Manhattan Opera-House must have come as a new kind of sensation. He might have said that it awakened a new sense. The music of other voices one feels as existing in a sequence of time. It begins, grows, wanes, and ends. Its beauty is momentary, subject to the change that moment after moment brings. The voice of Madame Melba one hears in a different way. While it is sounding one does not think of a beginning or an end. The loveliness of it does not seem to be living and dying with the creative effort of the artist. It is as separate from the effort as the Venus of Melos is separate from the sculptor who moulded it and died in ancient Greece. It is a sound that exists as colour in a painting or an attitude in sculpture exists, out of time in a world of space. The voice of Madame Melba is sculptural; it has the qualities of physical form. The voluptuous large body of her voice takes shape in the air. There is a sort of atmospheric softness about the firm but fluent modelling of the notes, and the phrasing curves into ample and gracious attitudes. The technical means by which she has so completely mastered her natural resources are, among all the others, the unsurpassably easy attack and release of her notes, and a command of breath which seems to make it inexhaustible, and which renders possible her perfect legato. But whatever the means, the effect remains that her singing seems spacious. She can lay a note out on the air as a painter lays a colour on his canvas, so that it seems to stay there. It sounds while you hear it as though it always had existed, and always would exist."—JOHN PITTS SANBORN, JUNIOR (New York).

In 1906 Melba accepted an engagement to sing at the Manhattan Opera-House, New York; but although the establishment of the new home of opera necessarily meant certain competition with the Metropolitan, she was careful to disassociate herself from any questions of strife that might develop, and, beyond giving loyal support to her manager, took no part or interest in the managerial rivalries in which the opera-going public became engrossed.

It is doubtful if any singer ever entered on a more difficult task than that which Melba cheerfully set herself when she agreed to link her reputation with the fortunes of the new Manhattan Opera-House of New York in its first season. The older house, the Metropolitan, where in previous years she had sung all her favourite rôles, and, with the support of irreproachable casts, had become a strongly established artistic and social institution, backed by a subscription list of $400,000 (£80,000), stands in the very heart of the theatre district; its directors included some of the most influential financial magnates of New York; it had all the glamour of years of success to enhance its claim on public support; and, in addition, lavish expenditure had been made to secure an extra-strong combination of artists, so that the new venture might be handicapped into speedy failure, strangled in the early hours of its audacious and—to some—unwelcome existence. On the other hand, the new opera-house—the Manhattan—had practically no subscription list, and New York's "four hundred" were directly interested in the financial success of the established home of Opera—the Metropolitan—for whatever support they gave the Manhattan might be counted as so much less to the funds

of the Metropolitan, for whose financial well-being the majority were responsible as guarantors or box-holders or both. Besides, the performances at the houses were fixed for the same times—Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings and Saturday afternoons—and since it was impossible to be in two places at once, it might reasonably be assumed that lovers of music would elect to use the seats for which they had paid already, rather than enter on an extra expenditure in the way of Opera patronage. And again, the Manhattan had no supporting financial syndicate, no board of directors, no division of responsibility, and it occupied a site far removed from the accepted amusement locality; its acoustic properties were unknown, and the completion of the building was carried out under circumstances of extreme difficulty and anxiety, accentuated by a serious accident to the guiding spirit, the new impresario, Mr. Oscar Hammerstein.

On the morning of the day announced for the opening, complete seating accommodation had not been provided, and it was only about an hour before the initial performance that the stalls were fixed in their place. Owing to diffidence on the part of some of the artists approached, and owing to the keen competition of the rival management in their bid for the services of others, Mr. Hammerstein was not able to get together a combination of leading singers entirely equal to those who usually are associated with Madame Melba. With the exception of one brief season many years before, as manager for Madame Lili Lehmann, Mr. Hammerstein had all his life been interested in providing an entirely different order of public amusement, and this circumstance was seized

on and exploited as an additional reason for the expected failure of his grand opera season. If Melba had been there to open it, perhaps it would have lived a little while, even in the face of such trying conditions, it was said, but without that initial fillip it had no chance. Even some of the singers who had promised to appear, at the last moment refused to leave Europe rather than risk association with so uncertain an enterprise; and in the American Courts an adverse verdict had already been given with regard to the production of "La Bohème," which was to have been one of the strongest attractions at the Manhattan. On the opening night, December 3, the building was crowded by an audience the majority of whom had attended out of curiosity. Many who had come to scoff remained to praise the conductor, the orchestra, the chorus, and, above all, the acoustics of the house, which turned out to be superb—second only, in the opinion of connoisseurs, to those of La Scala at Milan. But for all that, the public did not return on the succeeding nights, and the performances were given before audiences of the most depressing limitations. Melba was still in London at this time, and friends in New York cabled in the most emphatic terms urging her not to come. The season could not hold out many weeks, they said, and it would be fatal for her to endeavour to resuscitate a foredoomed venture.

On December 12 the receipts had fallen to $1,100 (210 guineas). In New York it had all along been rumoured that she had never seriously contemplated the engagement, and as she had not signed any contract with Mr. Hammerstein, the way was open for her to make a graceful withdrawal. She mentioned

the matter to some friends in London, and they, realizing the fate sure to overtake any inexperienced opera-manager who might elect to run grand opera in an unfashionable part of London, and in opposition to Covent Garden, summed up the situation in America accordingly, and said : " Don't go." Melba, as usual, eventually thought and decided for herself, and cabled the date of her departure to Mr. Hammerstein. " I like his pluck," she said ; " I will not fail him. Anyhow, he will have crowded houses when I sing," she added, with quiet confidence.

Such were the circumstances under which Melba started for New York on Saturday, December 22, 1906. She had gone through an exacting summer and autumn opera season in London, with many concerts on intervening dates, and would have gladly welcomed a holiday in the ordinary way. Yet, in spite of this somewhat uncertain if not discouraging prospect in America, she was buoyant and confident, and for the friends who assembled at the station and the directors who escorted her to her state-room on the *Caronia* she was full of laughing comment and breezy banter. When the steamer put out from the river-side, Melba still remained on deck, although the day was cold and wintry, and presently there came from the pier a loud, shrill " Coo-ee," the bush-cry of her native land. Although she had no idea of the source from whence came this greeting, she at once responded with an answering " Coo-ee," and kept it up at intervals until the call from the shore could no longer be heard. It was most interesting to hear how she, by the measure of early familiarity and exquisite art, could make this weird cry ring across the water, and to watch her utter unconsciousness of the

surrounding passengers, who were naturally intent on listening to the aboriginal salutation uttered by her voice of gold. Most of the passengers were, as usual, bored by the monotony of the trip ; but Melba, although she kept entirely to her own party, was constantly in good spirits, and when tired of reading, to which she gave most of her time, could always amuse herself with bridge, or even dominoes. As soon as it was possible, she sent a marconigram to Mr. Hammerstein, telling him she was in excellent health and spirits, and expressing her desire to open in "Traviata," and during the day she received a merry answer.

Ever since her first American season in 1893, Melba's arrival in New York had always aroused great attention, but never had public interest been so keen as now. Her success in England during the two preceding seasons had been more emphatic even than usual, and news of the still growing beauty of her voice, especially in the middle register, and of her riper dramatic powers had become a familiar story in New York. Then, it was known that Mr. Hammerstein, who is immensely popular in the United States, had entered on a most onerous enterprise against overwhelming odds, and that Melba, in electing to stand by him under such conditions, had shown a spirit as independent and courageous as his own. True, he had contracted to pay her travelling expenses and $3,000 (600 guineas) for every performance—the highest terms ever paid to any artist for a continuous series of appearances in any one city—and had further emphasized his managerial faith by placing a large sum to her credit before she left London. She was also to have a perfectly free

hand with regard to the concerts already arranged for her, or any more she might feel inclined to book, between her operatic engagements. Perhaps Mr. Hammerstein's known liberality added further to the favour of his venture. Be that as it may, when Melba stepped ashore, she was undoubtedly the most popular woman in New York.

In "Traviata" it is the custom for Violetta to wear a generous array of jewels, and as it was known that Melba for this opera would take a large portion of her collection with her, Mr. Hammerstein's arrangements for her reception included the attendance of two detectives. These, with a waiting army of press-men, photographers, musical enthusiasts, private friends, and her own extensive travelling party, made the landing a matter of considerable excitement, from which Melba, who hates public parade and show of any kind, gladly hurried to her rooms at the Hôtel St. Regis. But any hope of quiet in that luxurious hostel was quickly dispelled, and for the three days following, the numbers of visitors, letters, telegrams, packets, and telephone-calls were so great that Melba's entire party were on the verge of collapse. Fruit and flowers came from friends and strangers in such abundance as to make suitable acknowledgment impossible; and another exhausting circumstance for the party was the steam-heat, which, even when turned completely off in their rooms, was kept at such a point in the adjoining apartments that Melba's section was never so cool as the occupants wished.

This excessive heat and unrest proved too trying for the diva, so she took a furnished apartment in West Fifty-Eighth Street, cabled for linen, plate, and

servants from her London home, and for the following three months enjoyed being at the head of her own establishment in New York. The block of buildings in which was her apartment was one of the first of the kind erected in the city, and it enjoyed an additional interest for the new tenant, inasmuch as it had been built by Mr. Navarro, father-in-law of the beautiful Mary Anderson. A move to the new quarters was carried out on January 3, Melba having made her memorable *rentrée* at the Manhattan Opera-House the evening before. All the day of her reappearance she had seemed nervous—at any rate, much more restless than her wont—yet at intervals she was in exceptionally high spirits. After a short walk in Central Park she had lunch at the Savoy Hotel, and then played bridge between the times devoted to putting her house in order. Late in the afternoon she essayed to sleep, as a preliminary to the evening's exertions, but the attempt was futile, so she got up and amused herself with dominoes until it was time to start for the Opera. Mr. Hammerstein, in the hurry of the hour, had excusably forgotten to reserve any seats for Melba, and for several days it had been impossible even to buy back a ticket from the speculators; so she was faced by the unique experience of not being able to secure for love or money places for the members of her house-party, who had to stand throughout the evening.

This little detail gives some idea of the interest rife in the prima donna's first night, but no wealth of minutiæ could convey an exaggerated impression of the welcome extended to her. From the moment of her entrance until long after the close of the opera every possible opportunity was seized on for an out-

burst of enthusiasm. She had admirable support from Signor Bassi as Alfredo, Monsieur Renaud as Germont père, Monsieur Gilibert as the doctor, and Signor Cleofonte Campanini as conductor. After the first act there were ten curtain calls for Melba. There could be no doubt as to her gratification over the people's verdict given at a moment of particular significance, and on the way to her dressing-room she answered an inquiring admirer: "I am delighted, and as happy as a king." The scenes at the close of the succeeding acts were still more demonstrative. Several times after the second act she bowed her thanks in company with the artists supporting her; then she came alone. At the tenth recall she drew Signor Campanini on with her, and the next time she returned with Mr. Hammerstein. As the singer appeared with her intrepid impresario, the enthusiasm of the audience passed all bounds, and for some minutes there was a deafening uproar, during which hundreds of people waved their handkerchiefs, and the younger members of the audience threw their floral buttonholes at her feet. She had already been surrounded by elaborate bouquets and wreaths, but there was something very picturesque in the more informal tribute from the house.

The success of Mr. Hammerstein's great bid for public approval was emphatic. The routine at the Manhattan was changed in the most pronounced way, and the influence of Melba's art and fame not only packed the building on the nights she sang, but from her first appearance onward the business for all occasions improved so markedly that during the last weeks of his season Mr. Hammerstein found himself able to give opera every night of the week. Even

under the most favourable circumstances this would have been a remarkable achievement. Under the difficulties already mentioned it may reasonably be described as unparalleled in operatic history. When Melba was announced, the rival house, the Metropolitan, naturally put up their strongest attraction, but nothing could shake her hold on public favour. Whenever she sang, the house was sold out several days in advance, letters appeared in the leading papers protesting against the difficulty of procuring seats, and the management was blamed for not inventing conditions to block the activities of the ticket speculators. Then, again, the sale of standing-room places was so freely exercised that there were many angry complaints as to the licence allowed to or taken by Mr. Hammerstein in dangerously crowding the alley-ways and corridors. All "Melba nights" were practically the same. The receipts never fell to 2,100 guineas ($10,500), and on January 28 ("Lucia di Lammermoor"), February 14 ("Rigoletto"), March 25 ("La Bohème"), her farewell, and other occasions, they rose above 2,300 guineas ($11,500). As a matter of loyalty to Mr. Hammerstein, she refused all offers of public concerts in New York, but she fulfilled numerous concert engagements in other leading cities of the Eastern States. It was a great disappointment to the manager of the Manhattan to find that Melba's concert fixtures would not allow her to appear at the Opera for the extra performances for which the public now clamoured, and negotiations were opened at Pittsburg, Cleveland, and other cities, offering handsome terms of indemnity for her release, and the substitution of some first-class artist as a deputy. The answer came that no money would

compensate for her non-appearance, so wherever she had been definitely announced she went; but where matters had not progressed to the final stage, as at Ottawa, Toronto, and Winnipeg, she was able to cancel dates in favour of the Opera.

Her success at these orchestral concerts was a repetition of that attending her in opera. At Pittsburg she drew the largest audience known since the establishment of the orchestra; at Boston her final concert attracted the record attendance since the building of the Symphony Hall; and at Buffalo the rows of carriages interfered with the traffic five blocks away from Convention Hall. When someone showed Mr. Hammerstein a very clever cartoon of himself by Henry Mayer, the impresario appropriately said: "Ah, you should see Melba draw."

Owing to her many professional engagements and her enjoyment of home life, Madame Melba accepted few social invitations, but whenever possible she had friends in to dinner or lunch. The New York apartment had been beautified with draperies, ornaments, cushions, and interesting photographs from her English home, and, oddly enough, her visitors during the season included Mrs. Hwfa Williams, the former owner of Melba's town-house, and Lord Charles Beresford, owner of the beautiful country place which had been her summer residence during the preceding season.

On January 11 there was a great performance of "Rigoletto," with Melba, Renaud, and Bassi in the principal parts. Hundreds were turned away from the doors, standing-room tickets were sold at a guinea ($5) each, and the brass barrier of the box-office was broken away by an excited throng.

At a supper which followed at her home, the prima donna was full of amusing anecdotes for her guests, who included the Berlin conductor, Dr. Carl Muck, and his wife. The doctor had made a great success with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and everywhere his strong facial resemblance to Wagner had been commented on. This evening the doctor wore with pride a magnificent pair of diamond and ruby sleeve-links presented to him by the Kaiser, whose initial and crown composed the fastenings.

Early in January Madame Melba was joined by her son, Mr. George Nesbitt Armstrong, and his bride, and they remained as her guests until the end of March, when they returned to England, owing to the bridegroom having been appointed Lieutenant in the Royal Berkshire Militia. Their stay greatly added to the enjoyment of Melba, with whom they travelled to almost all her concerts in the Eastern States. They also made a trip to Texas, and the mother's heart rejoiced on hearing that, at an informal rough-riding competition, even the wildest of the horses had been unable to unseat her son. One of her pleasures was to whistle with him, and note the fluency and accuracy with which he could give her famous cadenzas. He also contributed much to her amusement by telling her of the curious business signs and quaint slang expressions then in vogue, and explained that in the big department stores the word "customer" was generally abbreviated to "cus," with disconcerting results to the uninitiated listening visitor.

Her own eagerness for fun never waned, and from morn till night she was ever on the *qui vive* for a joke. She saw the humorous side of every situation. A few days after her arrival she received a letter from a

foreigner, who said he was the director of an organized claque, and, as its leader, wished to place his services at her disposal. The name of this possibly inventive correspondent was Gilibert, and Melba saw a chance for a joke at the expense of her friend and colleague, Monsieur Gilibert. Enclosing the letter in an envelope to the popular baritone, she wrote a note saying that she had lately been puzzled as to his occupation, and, now that she had found it out, was sorry it was one in which she could offer him no encouragement. On another occasion, after dinner, when the fun was flagging for a time, she took a pack of cards, and with an admirable show of gravity pretended to tell the fortunes of her guests, making such happy guesses and startling prophecies, interlarded with waggish onslaughts on the subject's weaknesses, that in a few minutes the whole party was alert with curiosity and excitement.

In driving along Broadway one day, Melba noticed extensive advertisements of the "Jenny Lind" cigars, and incidentally expressed pleasure that the prima donna of a former day was still remembered. Despite the exacting demands on her time, Melba throughout the season made frequent opportunities to assist and encourage her colleagues, Madame Pauline Donalda and Signorina Emma Trentini, in their studies. Both had been engaged for this American tour on her recommendation, and she was never too tired or too busy to spare them explanations and lessons. She generously coached them in the most important of their rôles, and had her reward in the general comment on their rapid progress. When Madame Donalda, who sang nearly all Melba's parts, surprised her volunteer teacher by singing any phrase or passage with

increased beauty of tone, Melba's eyes would glisten with gratification, and she would walk up and down the room exclaiming: "Brava! brava!" Her patience during these self-imposed lessons was exceptional, although her condemnation of faults in phrasing, enunciation, or intonation was decisive and instantaneous.

When it was proposed to add "Lucia" to her Manhattan répertoire, she found herself at rehearsal without having had time to look at the score; but although she had not sung the opera since 1900, she was able to go right through the rôle without a single lapse of memory. The occasion of her first appearance in this once-favourite rôle was made the excuse for a special demonstration from the Australians resident in New York, who naturally felt very proud of their compatriot. The sale of standing-room tickets had to be stopped at six o'clock, and the scene without and within the house was one of unusual animation. Actors and actresses, writers, painters, merchants, and students, hailing from the land of the Southern Cross, were among her audience, and at the close of the Mad Scene they led the house in an ovation such as seldom falls to the lot of any celebrity. From the balcony and upper circle there were ear-splitting cries of "Coo-ee!" which were even repeated by some daring spirits in the stalls, when the Hon. Daniel O'Connor, ex-Postmaster-General for New South Wales, who had been the chief speaker at her farewell concert in Sydney, Australia, in 1886, stood up amid a little circle of Antipodeans, and in sonorous voice called out: "Bravo, Australia!" The curious bush call proved a puzzle to the remainder of the audience, but the general enthusiasm was so great

that hundreds of Americans and Italians tried to repeat it, and in this effort produced a very chaos of sound. Melba responded to at least twenty recalls, and at last, in exhaustion, let her arms drop in a gesture of helplessness. She was then permitted to retire. An Australian professor of music, Mr. Samuel Bowden Moyle, a stranger to Melba, had left an order with a New York florist to send her the first mimosa (wattle-blossom) of the season, to remind her of Australia, where its profusion makes spring a dream of fragrance. In an accompanying letter he said : " Let me tell you how proud we are of you and your superb art. We lose no opportunity of sharing in your triumphs, and we rejoice in your glorious success."

CHAPTER XXXVI

"There is still no voice like unto that of Madame Melba, and no one of her sisters on the operatic or concert stage uses voice with the like spontaneity and ease. Thirteen years have gone by since she first gave delight to this city, but charmed and applauding time has constantly enriched her. When she first visited us, her reputation was that of a brilliant *coloratura* singer, with a voice of unsurpassable beauty. Impersonating Mimi eight years ago, she showed that she was more than a singer of dazzling bravura. Her tones had a warmth, a sensuous quality, that some had denied her. Those who were so fortunate as to hear her memorable performance of Marguerite's music in 'The Damnation of Faust' at a Cecilia concert a few years ago were struck by the richness of her middle and lower tones, which were in themselves expressions of womanly and tender emotions.

"To-day this voice is still brilliant in florid passages; it still has the freshness, the 'girlish quality,' that has always characterized it, and set it apart from those of other singing women; but it now has a fulness, a richness, and a sumptuousness that are incomparably beautiful. The voice of Madame Melba would work a wondrous spell even if the artistry of the singer were not uncommon, thrice admirable. And perhaps the most striking characteristic of this voice as it is to-day is its impersonal nature. It is not so much the voice of a perfect singer as it is the ideal voice of song. The hearer revels in the tonal beauty. The tones themselves are charged with emotions of which, perhaps, the singer is not always conscious. The voice is like that of the hermit thrush apostrophized by Whitman:

> "'O liquid and free and tender!
> O wild and loose to my soul! O wondrous singer!'"

PHILIP HALE (Boston, 1907).

"FAUST," with Melba as Marguerite, was staged at the Manhattan on February 8, 1907, and, as on all previous occasions, the house was crowded in every part. The building, and especially her dressing-room, had been so overheated that during the second act she almost fainted, and at one time it seemed as though she would not be able to complete the opera. By the last act, however, she had entirely recovered, and sang the closing scene with incomparable brilliancy. In noticing the opera next day, the *New York Sun* pointed out that Melba alone could now draw to this opera an audience which a few years ago it needed herself, Jean de Reszke, Édouard de Reszke, and Lassalle to attract.

On Friday, February 22, Melba, who had never heard "Parsifal," attended a morning performance at the Metropolitan Opera-House, where the directors placed a box at her disposal, and some of them came to pay their personal respects and formally welcome her to the scene of her early American successes. The music and the manner of its rendering made a profound, even a remarkable, impression on her, and at the end of the first act she was unable to restrain her emotion. She heard the remainder of the work as though in a trance, and even hours afterwards, in her own apartment, could not shake off the influence of Wagner's music drama, which she unhesitatingly described as his masterpiece. The cast included Olive Fremstad (soprano), Burgstaller (tenor), and Van Rooy (bass), and Melba's enthusiasm over their interpretation was unbounded. She referred to Wagner's stipulation that "Parsifal" was not to be publicly performed outside Bayreuth,

and said she understood and appreciated his wishes; yet she freely expressed a measure of admiration for the enterprise that defied the great master's injunction, and gave this sublime performance to the American people. In spite of many distractions during the evening, Melba continued absorbed in "Parsifal," and ever and anon her eyes would become moist with tears as she recalled some special phrase or scene. Those of the house-party tried to turn her thoughts to other things, but without avail, and as she retired late that night she said in a sort of soliloquy: "How great this work, how great! And yet here am I going to sing in 'Traviata' to-morrow. How can I do it? Heaven, how can I do it?" Then she added: "I remember, when I went to Bergamo for the Donizetti Centenary in 1897, I was shown some of the Italian composer's manuscript which had been copied by Wagner. Carefully and clearly written out by Wagner, as a means of earning his bread! The tragedy of it! I should think Wagner's heart must have almost broken in the task."

The next day she sent for the score of "Tristan und Isolde," with which, however, she had long been entirely familiar, and the interest of that whole day was given to a fresh study of this opera. Melba is fond of talking of Wagner and everything connected with his life and his compositions, and if his music did not so often place an unreasonable tax on the human throat, she would certainly have derived the keenest pleasure from constantly identifying herself with Wagnerian rôles. The operas of his in which she did earlier appear, as already shown, are "Tannhäuser," "Lohengrin," and "Siegfried," and she

also made a close study of "The Flying Dutchman," in which it is probable she may soon be heard. In relinquishing the other rôles Melba recognized that the "Dresden-china-like quality" of her voice would certainly be marred by their continuance.

Another interesting Manhattan production was that of "La Bohème," and in the litigation which raged round this opera it was apparently thought by some that the tactics of the opposition house, the Metropolitan, had exceeded the usual limit of business competition. Melba had established Puccini's work both in England and America, and it was well known on both sides of the Atlantic that the present popularity of the opera was due to the combined influence of her art, her judgment, and her courage. Under these circumstances, it seemed a little ungracious, however business-like, to place any obstacle in the way of her appearing in it, and when the question of opposition was first mooted it was generally discredited. It was also known that Mr. Hammerstein had specially counted on Melba's appearance in "La Bohème," and that he had gone to great expense in the engagement of a suitable supporting cast and in the mounting, which subsequently proved to be quite superior to that furnished at Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera-House. But in spite of these facts the Metropolitan management took the matter into court, and in asking for an injunction against the Manhattan management claimed to have the sole rights of "La Bohème" in the United States of America. The legal verdict went against Mr. Hammerstein, but he appealed, and on the showing that

Messrs. Recordi and Co., the agents for Signor Puccini, had through their representatives given the Manhattan impresario the right of American production—which, moreover, was then being exercised throughout the United States without let or hindrance by the San Carlo Opera Company and the Henry Savage Opera Company, among others—the appeal decision went in favour of Mr. Hammerstein, who by this time had come to be regarded by some as the object of a certain amount of persecution. On the verdict in his support being given, the Metropolitan management lodged a further appeal, and in operatic circles excitement reached a high pitch when Mr. Hammerstein, defying consequences, announced his determination to produce "La Bohème" under any circumstances. Access to the authorized score was denied him, and the only parts he could secure were those roughly transcribed some years before for performance by the Del Conti Opera Company, which was a small organization.

In order to minimize the chance of threatened interference with the proposed Manhattan production, the public announcement of the chosen date was delayed as long as possible; and when at length it was made, extra steps were taken to handicap the producer and lessen his claim on the support of the public. Through the medium of the newspapers, statements were published claiming that, under the known circumstances, an adequate performance of "La Bohème" at the Manhattan was an impossibility, and terse announcements to the same effect were circulated among the critics, professional musicians,

amateurs, and every other interested section of the New York public. Rumours were current that, if the performance went on while the appeal to the highest court was still pending, Madame Melba and Mr. Hammerstein would be committed for contempt of court, and even as late as half an hour before the curtain went up representatives of the opposition coterie assembled in the vestibule of the Manhattan and loudly voiced their opinions, so that all who passed might hear. In order to keep clear of the legal warfare, the principal conductor, Signor Campanini, had from the outset decided not to associate himself with the public production, and the baton fell to the hand of his deputy, Mr. Tanara. Such were the circumstances under which the first performance of "La Bohème" was given at the Manhattan Opera-House, New York, on March 1, 1907.

The difficulties, it will be seen, were enormous, and could never have been overcome had it not been for the enthusiasm and energy of Melba, who spent hours at a stretch in the theatre, and helped and guided in every possible way. If certain conditions compelled Campanini to hold aloof from the public performance, he was free to give his best energies to assisting at the rehearsals, and in this particular he gave loyal and indefatigable service to his manager. There was, of course, an overflowing audience, and long before the performance began there were signs of wholly unusual interest. Notwithstanding the handicap placed on the orchestra by the absence of complete parts, the scenes went with éclat, and the first, second, and third acts were given with a subtlety

and vim never before equalled by the London or New York casts. Melba was at her best, and enhanced her familiar success as Mimi. She was naturally the heroine of the evening, and even if she had been at her worst, she would still have received an ovation on that particular occasion. Enthusiasm ran riot, and when, after many recalls on the close of the third act, she eventually brought Mr. Hammerstein before the footlights, there was another of those wild scenes of popular approval to which the New York people had now accustomed her. The final appeal to the Supreme Court reversed the decision given in favour of Mr. Hammerstein; still, the triumph of that 1st of March is one that he may again repeat, as a friendly settlement has now been arranged.

None but a woman of extraordinary physical vigour could have gone through the amount of artistic activity and travel which this American season involved. As an instance of the tax placed on Melba's powers of endurance, a week's engagements may be cited. On Monday, March 18, she travelled from Chicago to Philadelphia, a journey of twenty-two hours; on Tuesday, March 19, she sang at Philadelphia; she then returned to New York and sang at the Manhattan Opera-House on Wednesday, March 20. The following day, Thursday, March 21, she had a ten hours' train trip to Pittsburgh, in which city she sang through heavy programmes both on Friday, March 22, and Saturday, March 23. The night of March 23 she spent in the train on the return to New York, where on Sunday, March 24, she was busy making records for a gramophone or talking-machine company, who for the selections, which she

easily completed within a week, paid her a cash bonus of 10,000 guineas ($50,000), with more to follow in the way of royalties. On the following day, Monday, March 25, she made her farewell appearance at the Manhattan. Such a programme might well tax the strength of even the most robust. Melba came through it in a most astonishing manner, the marvellously fresh quality of her voice not being impaired in the slightest degree. But even a Melba could not have encompassed such a week's activity had it not been that she was stimulated by the people's continued enthusiasm.

The scene on the occasion of her final performance was described by the newspaper representatives and others present as quite unique in the modern musical history of New York. The speculators did a brisk business in the sale of tickets, and stalls changed hands at as high a price as 6 guineas ($30) each. Some of the writers quoted much higher figures. "La Bohème" and the Mad Scene from "Lucia di Lammermoor" were set down as the evening's bill, in deference to requests forwarded to the box-office. Long and lavish applause marked the whole proceedings, and reached a climax after the excerpt from Donizetti's opera. On her first call after "Lucia," floral devices of all kinds had been heaped on the stage, until she was almost lost to view behind the bank they formed. Then the audience began to leave their places and rush as close as they could get to the footlights, over which men and women threw little bunches of roses and violets and lily-of-the-valley. These they clamoured for her to return to them as souvenirs, and while she scattered them back

among her admirers the enthusiasm increased, and, as the *New York Herald* remarked, the audience also enacted a "mad scene." Showers of small flowers and rose-leaves were thrown from the proscenium boxes, women were as bold as the men in their cheery "Bravas!" and the ardour and unconvention of the leave-taking brought happy but unshed tears to Melba's eyes. Time and again she expressed her acknowledgment in eloquent gesture, and the lights were lowered as a reminder of the necessity to clear the theatre. Melba herself, in a jocular spirit, assumed a threatening attitude, and said: "Won't you go home?" "No!" called back scores of voices; and then she signalled some of the stage attendants to bring a piano on the stage. This was quickly done, and, sitting down at it, she sang "Mattinata" to her own accompaniment. Those who were leaving the theatre at the time rushed back for this unexpected item, and their return only added to the liveliness of the scene. Applause like pandemonium was Melba's reward for this last contribution, and a young fellow in the balcony, in an excess of ardour, having no other offering, threw a round empty cardboard box (which had contained flowers or candy) at her feet. Melba by this time was in full accord with the unconventionality of the moment, and, catching the box, she put it on her head in an inverted position. The brightest stage joke ever perpetrated could never have evoked such appreciation as this. Everybody joined in the roar of laughter, the "gods" were beside themselves with delight, and boyish trebles could be heard exclaiming in the slang of the day, "Ain't she a crackerjack!" "She's all the candy!" and other vernacular com-

pliments. Twenty-three times she had come before the curtain after the close of the "Lucia" selection, and it was only when she seemed utterly exhausted that she was eventually permitted to retire. But even then she was but in the middle of the evening's business. Her next duty was to remove her stage clothes and make-up, and array herself in up-to-date evening attire for the banquet which a grateful impresario had arranged in her honour. The tables were laid on the stage, and in addition to the artists of the company, the business staff of the opera-house, and the principal critics, there were present a number of New York's leading citizens. It was again impressed on Melba that no artist stood so high as she did in the affection and esteem of the American public. An unknown admirer presented her with a clay model of herself as Violetta, and with a few simple words of appreciation she privately expressed her obligation to all concerned. As souvenirs of the season she asked Mr. Hammerstein's acceptance of a dress watch, and to Signor Campanini and the heads of the several departments she gave scarf-pins and other suitable mementoes. The sale of Melba's autographs during the eleven weeks' season brought in 30 guineas ($150), to which she added 70 guineas ($350), and gave the whole towards the building of an addition to the Blind Babies' Home. They called it the Melba Annex, and addressed the great singer as "Lady Sunshine." Certain it is that her generosity as well as her voice brought happiness to many hearts during the Opera campaign of 1907, which in every respect was one of the most memorable of her career.

During this season the death occurred, at Paris, of

Mr. Maurice Grau, who first took Melba to America, and who remained one of her most admiring friends to the end. In voicing her sympathy and regret, the question of her earlier suggestion, that the American musical public owed a monument to his old colleague Henry Abbey, was once more temporarily revived.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"Marvellously endowed as she is in both the gifts of voice and ear, even these, superb as they are, would have carried her only a short distance to the place she occupies had they not been associated with, and carried to triumph by, undoubted resolution, unwearied patience, incessant discipline, and courage that knows no bounds. She wears the crown of song because she has won it, and won it in the amphitheatre where the world's choicest and most gifted sons and daughters compete for recognition."—THE RIGHT HON. ALFRED DEAKIN.

ON landing at Cherbourg from America early in April, Melba caught a severe chill while standing in an exposed position on the tender during the trans-shipment of the mails. A serious illness, of which little was said, was the result, and for some time afterwards the right lung continued affected. A grave disappointment which this illness involved to Melba was the cancelling of her appearances in Brussels, the city of her operatic début. One of these performances was to have been for a Belgian charity, and she had looked forward to the occasion with great interest.

Relying on her usual powers of recuperation, the directors at Covent Garden felt safe in announcing her reappearances in London, and the public interest in her coming was shown in the also usual rush for tickets and their sale at large premiums. The most deter-

mined fight against her physical condition, in a struggle to enable the directorate to keep faith with the public, was of no avail, and she had to accept the inevitable and remain out of the bill. The knowledge that many people had paid increased prices to hear her sing, and that others had made certain sacrifices of convenience in order to be present, intensified her natural disappointment. Some days later, when going to Covent Garden for a performance of "Traviata," she noticed that the crowd anxious to hear her was more than double what the unreserved parts of the house would accommodate, so, in order to save them from a further tiring and useless wait, she asked one of her servants to explain to those on the fringe of the assemblage. A woman who thinks of such small matters is not the one to break faith needlessly with the public ; indeed, all through her professional career, Melba has been noted for her desire not to surround her appearances with any of those elements of uncertainty which in earlier days were regarded as the necessary atmosphere of every successful singer.

For the royal soirée given at Buckingham Palace on June 8 in honour of the King and Queen of Denmark, King Edward paid Melba the compliment of directly expressing his wish that she should sing on that evening, and His Majesty further enhanced the occasion by also commanding her to appear at the gala performance given at Covent Garden on June 11 in celebration of the Danish Sovereigns' visit—a performance which was tragically marked by the painfully sudden death of Sir Arthur Ellis, who was in attendance on the King. In noticing this performance, the *Times* described the ease and finish of Melba's singing as "miraculous."

Melba's great personal disappointment of this season was her inability, owing to continued illness, to take her place in the charity matinée organized by the Duchess of Connaught, and held at Covent Garden in June. When the scheme had been originally proposed by the Duchess, Melba was the first volunteer both for the programme and the committee work, and had suggested to Her Royal Highness the names of Mlle. Destinn, Signor Caruso, and Dr. Richter as willing co-operators. By the way, it was not till June of this year that Melba heard Destinn sing, and in the interval she went behind the scenes to congratulate the Bohemian soprano.

On June 25, however, she was once more able to resume her services in the cause of charity, and at the Duchess of Abercorn's concert given at Bridgewater House for an orphan home in Ireland she received an ovation such as none could remember having ever before been extended to an artist singing in a private house. A few days earlier she was a brilliant figure at the garden-party given by the King and Queen at Windsor Castle.

For the closing night of the Opera season, July 30, "La Bohème" was given, with Melba in her familiar rôle. Queen Alexandra occupied the royal box, and was evidently delighted with and amused by the vehement applause of the great audience. Her Majesty not only remained to the termination of the opera, but waited for several of the recalls accorded to the artists on the fall of the curtain. Although the actual date of Melba's departure for Australia had been carefully concealed, the audience knew she was leaving London for a year, and this knowledge led to an extra zest in their leave-taking. When the

theatre had been emptied, hundreds of people, many of them in evening dress, crowded round the stage-door and watched for her exit. As the last night of the season is one on which Melba always waits to make some acknowledgment of her indebtedness to the heads of the several stage departments, she was unusually long in making her appearance; but the crowd stayed on in the utmost good-humour, and cheered her heartily when she passed to her carriage. Numbers of the young Australian singers and students, who now make quite a considerable colony in London, are always in evidence on the nights when their famous countrywoman sings, and in addition to the Bush cry of "Coo-ee!" at the stage-door, there were many cheers for her native land from the party of colonial youths who ran beside her until the carriage crossed Long Acre.

Melba's home-coming in 1902 aroused a unique popular demonstration. Her return in 1907 was almost equally though inversely dramatic, for when the mail-steamer reached Perth, no one on shore had any idea she was on board. The visit was to be strictly private, taken for the purpose of spending some time with her father and enjoying a restful holiday in her own sunny country. To secure the desired privacy, it was not disclosed what steamer she would travel by; instead of her famous pseudonym, she was booked under her family name; and the embarkation of her son and his wife, her private secretary and servants, was all carried out so as not to direct any attention to her identity. The cable agents in London had been requested not to telegraph any particulars, and the Australian newspapers were all asked in advance to co-operate in securing the

quietness which she desired. It was, however, impossible to obtain complete adherence to her wishes, and directly the steamer reached Fremantle, where a short stoppage was made, she was recognized by the people who came on board. Accepting the invitation of the Governor and Lady Bedford to lunch at Government House, Perth, Melba was unlucky enough to miss the steamer train, and the necessity of engaging a special in order to resume the sea-voyage began the fire of good-humoured raillery which was thenceforward directed towards every trifling incident. Not anticipating any such emergency, Melba had not brought on shore sufficient money to pay for the special train, and, in reply to the humorous request of the singer, the Governor's representatives offered themselves as guarantors for the expenditure. The Government subsequently intimated to His Excellency that they were glad to have had an opportunity of offering some slight service to the distinguished Australian, and declined to accept payment for the train.

Continuing the journey from Adelaide, the mail-train was stopped at Burrumbeet in order to let her repair to her temporary home, Ercildoune Estate, the beautiful station residence of the late Sir Samuel Wilson's family, without first entering the city of her birth; and this stratagem insured her a few wholly quiet days with her father.

As it has so often been stated in England and America that Mr. Mitchell's religious scruples have kept him from seeing his daughter in any of the operatic rôles which she has made famous, it may be here stated that he has always been a consistent and liberal patron of music and the drama, and is

MR. DAVID MITCHELL, MELBA'S FATHER

among the first subscribers for every musical and dramatic enterprise brought before the public of Melbourne. True, he has never heard Melba in any complete performance of an opera, but that is because unkind circumstances have denied him an opportunity which he, above all others, would appreciate to the fullest extent. Owing to a serious illness, brought on by the harshness of the English climate, Mr. Mitchell was compelled to return to his home in Melbourne before she had made her début at Brussels. During the ensuing fifteen years, which saw the building of her universal fame, considerations of health forbade his leaving Australia, and when she returned there for her never-to-be-forgotten tour in 1902-03, it was to sing in concert only, although a few performances made up of scenes from different operas were eventually given in Melbourne and Sydney. At these operatic entertainments Mr. Mitchell was an entranced visitor, although the disconnected scenes could not give a wholly satisfactory idea as to the value of her work in a complete representation.

On this holiday visit Melba made her first public appearance in Melbourne, on September 14, at one of Madame Clara Butt's concerts. On entering with her father, she was instantly recognized by the people, who, forgetting her plea for an incognito, cheered her with vigour until she was compelled to rise and bow in acknowledgment. To the English contralto at her opening concert she sent an uncommon floral device, which was draped with a sash bearing the opening bars of Madame Butt's favourite song, "Abide with me." One of the first occasions on which the contralto had sung it was at a Melba concert in London ten years earlier.

Among the local matters with which Melba early identified herself was a movement to secure the Australian adoption of the normal musical pitch.

Prior to her arrival in Victoria, the manager of an enterprising Melbourne firm, who was keenly alive to the possibilities of a valuable advertisement, took the risk of sending a piano and pianola to Ercildoune in the hope of their retention. Having made other provision for her musical requirements, Melba directed her secretary to request the removal of the unsolicited instruments. Ostensibly for the purpose of carrying out her instructions, but in reality with the hope of inducing Melba to change her mind, an expert operator was sent to wait upon her. Riding through the Bush towards the homestead, he encountered two youthful equestrians, of whom he inquired the way to Ercildoune. They happened to be going there, invited him to join them, and after a lively ride they parted at the gates.

The expert succeeded in getting a personal interview with the prima donna, who was obdurate to all his powers of persuasion, and he was on the point of retreat, when his recent riding companions appeared on the scene, and were revealed as Mr. and Mrs. George Armstrong. They ranged themselves on the side of the salesman, and after explaining that the piano and pianola were a real necessity to the smoking-room, where they could not possibly disturb her, Melba yielded to their importunities, and, smiling over her feeble resistance, went indoors. The unwieldy cases were still lying on the veranda, and how to get the instruments into place without proper appliances or assistance before the diva changed her mind was the next problem. The difficulty was overcome by

harnessing the two gardeners and the expert into a pulling team, of which young Armstrong and his bride constituted themselves the leaders. In this fashion the moving began, but to the accompaniment of so much laughter that Melba came out to inquire the cause of all the merriment. Without any ado she joined in the fun, and, with instructions to "pull together," declared herself overseer and time-keeper. When the instruments were in position, the salesman undertook to teach her son how to get the best effects from the pianola, the diva and her daughter-in-law being interested listeners. For this anticipated opportunity the visitor had provided several scrolls of favourite Melba airs. At first she began to beat time faintly, then she hummed a few notes, and finally, forgetting all else, burst into full song. The little audience listened in delight, and at the finish, when Melba realized the oddity of the situation, she laughingly expressed her delight with the "musical machinery," and the tactful expert retired in triumph.

Melba's unwillingness to deceive, her strict regard for honesty, was demonstrated by a trifling incident during the early days of her visit. Requiring some chintz, she went to a leading furnishing shop in Melbourne, and, on hearing the price of the material shown her, declared that it was three times more than she had paid for the same thing in London. The salesman appeared to be greatly surprised at the alleged striking difference in price, but probably thought the statement one of those careless exaggerations said to be used by women when engaged in the subtleties of shopping, more especially as she bought the chintz at the price asked. Returning home, she found, on inquiry from her secretary, that she had

been altogether wrong in the London price she had quoted to the salesman. Most men and women, even those with plenty of spare time on hand, would have let the matter rest, but Melba insisted on a message being telephoned to the shop explaining her mistake.

To a woman of her mental and physical activity, the allurements of rural seclusion could not make a very extended appeal, and after a few weeks she also leased a town-house in Melbourne. A distance of about ninety miles separated her two residences, but she changed from one to the other with an airy disregard for mileage that quickly dissipated all idea of the proposed term of rest. Before a month had passed she was in full enjoyment of her usual exceptional health, and the indefatigable manner in which she entered into every kind of amusement surprised and delighted the people. Dinners and receptions innumerable were given for her entertainment, and at the first ball she attended she danced every measure on the programme with a zest that any débutante might have envied. Races, theatres, cricket-matches, all strove for the privilege of her attendance, and her coming on each occasion was watched for and greeted as the event of the day. From gaieties such as these indicated she turned easily to give her support to charity bazaars and other worthy causes, one morning being set apart for a visit to the Blind Asylum at Melbourne, where she sang song after song to the poor sightless inmates until their applause almost took away her voice. Wherever she went she was the darling of the people, between whom and herself there had grown a more intimate understanding, a more familiar relationship, than had existed

during the unforgettable visit of 1902-03, when she passed through the land a regal, dazzling figure, invested by popular imagination with an armour of imperious reserve.

As during the preceding visit, the Presbyterian Ladies' College made haste to welcome the singer, who for the year held office as President of the Old Collegians' Association, and she was the guest of honour at the annual lawn-party of her alma mater. In accepting the invitation, she made an amusing stipulation that in any music performed operatic airs must be rigidly excluded. The occasion was marked with great éclat, and as Melba, surrounded by the eminent divines associated with the college, passed through lines of white-robed pupils, who formed a guard of honour, the scene was one of considerable pictorial interest. The Rev. Dr. Alexander Marshall spoke the formal words of welcome, and Melba being too nervous to read a brief reply which she had prepared, Senator Ewing performed that office for the prima donna, who, among other things, had written: "There are few things in this world which realize what we hope of them, and our greatest successes and achievements are often far less to ourselves than they seem to others, because we know how much more we aim to do, and the labour, often great and bitter, has been all our own. It has been my fortune to see almost all the world under advantageous circumstances, and I have been blessed with a more than common share of success. Yet to-day, when I come here among this little community of pretty and happy girls, my own school-days come back to me vividly again. I have known triumphs since then, and loved them, too, but for all of them I feel sure

that the days of hope and joy at school are among the best we can any of us look for."

Constant efforts were made to induce Melba to depart from her early expressed determination not to sing in public during the visit, and late in November, when what is known as "the season" had closed, and when numbers of people were leaving the cities for the coolness of their country retreats, she consented to give a series of concerts in Melbourne and Sydney. No one but Melba could have successfully entered on such an experiment under such conditions, but then, as on many other occasions, she was a law unto herself. In America the year before, in discussing a most flattering business proposal with the director of a gramophone company, she bluntly said: "I don't think you have made proper acknowledgment of all you owe me. I was the first great singer to consent to my voice being recorded. All the others refused, because they were uncertain of results. I saw the possibilities of development, and I took the risk. The same with the Manhattan Opera-House. Other famous artists were afraid to associate themselves with the new and powerfully opposed venture. I have come against all advice. What other artist in my position would have done it?" "Madame, no other artist dare," interjected the director, and his implied compliment was merely the simple truth.

The night before the opening of the box plan for the first of these concerts at Melbourne, scores of people stood in the street from midnight, and in a subsequent fancy illustration in the *Bulletin* an interrupted burglar was depicted excusing himself from arrest on the plea that his nocturnal activity was merely incidental to the Melba box-plan vigil. It

would be superfluous to describe the crowds and enthusiasm at these concerts. Both in Melbourne and Sydney, on her first appearance, she had to make a gesture of appeal for a cessation of the applause, lest its continuance should unnerve her. In both cities she stood knee-deep among banks of floral offerings, those of the Governor-General of the Commonwealth, of the State Governors, and of the Premier of Victoria, having the added compliment of personal presentation.

In discussing musical matters at Sydney connected with her own doings, Melba said : " I have not missed a single season at Covent Garden since my début there as Lucia in 1888. In this way I shall complete my twenty years' service next season, and I believe the directorate will celebrate that event and my birthday anniversary simultaneously as soon as possible after May 19. The record is something to be proud of, the rarity arising in part from the fact that a single miss from illness or absence abroad or the failure to be engaged would break the sequence of success.

" Yes, I created the rôle of Hélène in Saint-Saën's opera of that name at Monte Carlo, and had intended singing in it at New York this year, as the music is beautiful, and was originally a great success. In style the piece is more like a cantata allied with spectacular effect than like grand opera. There are scenes showing the burning of Troy and the subsequent departure of the ships. In London the work was not very highly appreciated, but audiences there are very conservative, and are slow in adding to their répertoire of ' old friends.' In that respect music-lovers move along faster in America, and that is how

it was I sang 'Le Cid' some time ago in New York, though the opera has not yet been put up in England. It is a lovely work, and during my brief Sydney season I hope to sing 'Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux,' from it, and possibly the 'Alleluia.'"

Before leaving Sydney, Melba was waited on by Ratu Kadavu Levu and Ratu Pope, native princes of Fiji, who wished to pay homage to her and greet her as the *matai* (champion) of singers. They presented her with a *tabua* (whale's tooth)—indicative of the highest honour in the gift of a Fijian chief. According to ancient custom, this talisman carries with it the freedom of Fiji. In olden times the possessor of the *tabua* could send to the ruler from whom the symbol was received and secure as many fighting men as the circumstances of any troublous emergency required. Among the other gifts presented to Melba by the Fijian chiefs were mats as fine as delicate lace, which had been beaten from the bark of native trees.

Commenting on Australia's noticeable advance along the paths of art since her last visit, Melba remarked: "I think that there is an immense stride toward a finer appreciation of song and painting and the printed word. Melbourne and Sydney, too, seem to have made noticeable advances both in appreciation and in performance in all the arts. It must not be imagined that I take an interest only in music, although, perhaps, my keenest interests lie in that direction. One of my first visits this time was to the Art Gallery. I was delighted to see that they have bought a Corot. That is the first step in the right direction. When next I come here I hope to see a Gainsborough and a Reynolds, perhaps even a Rembrandt.

"One thing one misses out here is Sunday music. You know, I may describe myself as one of the pioneers of the Sunday-night concerts at the opera-houses in New York. I cannot see why Sunday-night concerts at popular prices cannot be held both in Melbourne and Sydney. I know that some people will not like my saying this, but I must say it, for I cannot see how anyone can be harmed by hearing the music of the great masters—the symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, the fine oratorios of Handel, all the beauty which one finds in the orchestral and chamber-music of the world's noblest musicians. And it must be remembered, too, that thousands of people have only Sunday nights upon which to hear music. I believe that concerts of this kind would be tremendously patronized. There must be many who have to work all the week, yet who have taste enough to appreciate good music, and who thirst for it as I did when a child. In London and Paris—in fact, in all the centres of art—these concerts are given, and it is only when one has been there, and knows what it is ever to have good music at one's command, that one realizes the deficiency which exists in Australia. Any objection to the public performance of fine music upon Sunday seems rather narrow. Yes, I suppose I shall offend some by this statement, but I am sure there will be many who will approve."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"The greatest singers of the day are among my patients. I conducted some experiments with Madame Melba regarding resonance. The most elastic vocal cord to-day is Madame Melba's. She makes use of the anterior portion of the cord, and that accounts for the lasting quality of her voice. There is no person with more resonance and less nasal quality than Madame Melba."
—Dr. John Milsom Rees.*

Melba's final week in her native State was one of interesting activity. Sunday, February 16, was the eightieth anniversary of her father's birthday, and from the early morning, when she accompanied him to Scots Church, where he had regularly taken her as a child, until the close of the day she devoted herself to his pleasure. The following day she was entertained at a farewell gathering by the University Conservatorium of Music, at which the Principal, Professor Petersen, the Premier of the State, and the Minister of Education made feeling references to the guest of honour.

Four days later, when she left Melbourne, there was another flattering testimony of the people's esteem. A large crowd assembled outside the railway-station, and platform-tickets were necessarily limited to her personal friends and the members of

* Evidence in Horspool versus Cumming musical libel suit at the Royal Courts of Justice, London, February 1908.

Australia (in tears)—"MY SONG-BIRD HAS FLOWN AGAIN"

(FROM "THE MELBOURNE PUNCH," FEBRUARY 19[illegible])

the Women's Exhibition Choir, who, to the number of fifteen hundred, came to serenade her. Clad in pure white dresses, with corsage badges of Australia's golden wattle, these women singers supplied an effective pictorial note in a scene which was further enhanced by the quantities of beautiful flowers sent for Melba's acceptance. The choir, among other numbers, sang "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow," "Home, Sweet Home," and "Auld Lang Syne," and it is not to be wondered at that, when the time came to say farewell, she was voiceless from emotion. As the train moved away, the throng outside the station joined those on the platform in three hearty cheers.

Speaking of that occasion on her return to London, she said: "I think the greatest event in my life was when I was serenaded at Melbourne by a choir of fifteen hundred women, many of whom had travelled from the hills and seaside to bid me 'Good-bye.' It was an honour the spontaneity of which I fully appreciate, and can never forget. Imagine fifteen hundred women singing together, and producing a vocal effect so charming, so harmonious, that it is impossible to describe. It touched my heart-strings, and I felt very proud at being one of them—an Australian woman." At Adelaide, where she embarked on the *Orontes*, Melba was also serenaded and cheered by great gatherings whose enthusiasm deeply impressed her.

On the voyage to England she was the life and soul of the steamer, promoting amusement and joining in every game devised for the enjoyment of the passengers. The night before the *Orontes* reached Naples she was the merriest figure at the fancy-dress dance given on board, and took part in every measure on the programme with a gaiety that charmed her fellow-

travellers. One of these, being in want of some emerald silk to complete her improvised Irish costume, was startled to hear Melba order the spoliation of a beautiful Paris hat, so that the young lady might be supplied with the necessary colouring. A proposed motor-trip from Naples through the Italian and French Riviera to Paris was frustrated by the break-down of the machine before reaching Rome, so Melba made the journey by rail. Immediately on arrival in Paris she began the dramatic study of "La Tosca" for the London season.

While so engaged she received a flattering requisition, signed by Victorien Sardou, Ludovic Halevy, Camille Saint-Saëns, Jules Massenet, Jean Richepin, Maurice Donnay, Paul Hervieu, and Alfred Carus, requesting her services for a gala representation at the Paris Opera in aid of the benefit fund of the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, and the date of June 11 was selected to suit her convenience. Always popular in the French capital, where she lived for the first fourteen years of her professional life, the announcement of her reappearance after an absence of six years from the Opera aroused special interest. "Rigoletto" was the opera selected for the occasion, with Signor Caruso and Monsieur Renaud as the Duke and the jester. On the first intimation of this performance, members of the Rothschild family, with their customary generosity, initiated a scale of exceptional prices by subscribing £200 each for boxes and £40 each for stalls. The performance was an extraordinary success, the receipts reaching £5,400, and Melba was given an ardent welcome.

While lunching with Madame Marchesi in Paris during Easter week, Melba first met Madame Ellen

Gulbranson, the great Wagnerian singer, with whom she found herself in strong sympathy, not the least of their common bonds being an affectionate regard for the aged teacher, who had lately lost her husband, and whose loneliness they were endeavouring to cheer. On the day of their meeting, Melba, to the accompaniment of Herman Bemberg, sang several arias for the little party. A desire to hear Madame Gulbranson in some of her great numbers was then expressed, but it was thought that there was no one present who could play the accompaniments from memory. Melba volunteered, and the Scandinavian artist sang "Elizabeth's Greeting" superbly. Probably no vocal effort of Melba's ever caused Madame Marchesi greater pride than her pupil's ability to adequately accompany Madame Gulbranson in the "Tannhäuser" air. The voice and art of the Wagnerian singer delighted Melba, who, before parting, pledged herself to visit Bayreuth in order to hear Madame Gulbranson in "Parsifal," which had so impressed her when she first heard it in New York.

Before entering on her twenty-first consecutive "grand" season at Covent Garden, during the course of which she has also appeared throughout three autumn seasons, Melba received from the King a command to sing at the gala performance given in honour of Monsieur Fallières, President of the French Republic, at Covent Garden on May 27, 1908.

To her credit had now been placed the unique distinction of having been commanded to every gala performance held at Covent Garden since her début, and to almost every royal concert given in honour of visiting heads of State or their heirs apparent during the same period, commencing with the gala

commemorative of the Shah of Persia's visit in 1889. This list of royal favours is apart from the different State concerts for which her artistic services have from time to time been requisitioned, and no singer of any land or any generation can claim a similar record.

As considerable misconception appears to exist with regard to the appearances of singers at royal functions, it may appropriately be pointed out that a "command" can only come from the actual head of the State. The other members of the English Royal house are always scrupulously careful not to infringe on the prerogative of the King or Queen in this respect, although in the newspapers of the day they are often credited with giving "commands." As an indication of respect, and in deference to his personal popularity, the expressed wish of the Prince of Wales, however, is always accepted as equivalent to a "command."

Whenever any lyric soprano of exceptional talent makes a successful appearance at Covent Garden, or in New York, or in any of the great Opera centres of Europe, there are always a few people who interpret such success as a challenge to the supremacy of Melba. This usual development reached an unusual stage during the Australian artist's absence in her native land, and her reappearance at Covent Garden on May 19, 1908—which happened to be the anniversary of her birthday, and the first night of her twenty-first consecutive "grand" season at London's Royal Opera—consequently aroused unwonted interest. Although Melba knew little of what had been said and done during her absence, she set her influence against the cultivation of any form of rivalry between herself and her colleagues (and against the sensa-

tionalism which had been widely promulgated) by making her *rentrée* in the too familiar "La Bohème," an opera which allows her practically no opportunity for brilliant vocal display, and which has in it no element to make any special appeal to the enthusiasm of even her wildest partisans.

The result was astonishing. The whole of the reserved seats were sold out within a couple of hours after the opening of the box plan, and for the unreserved gallery people waited in the street from the early morn. The box- and stall-holders, who have always been her strongest supporters, showed their friendship for her by a display of diamonds never before equalled on any but a gala night, and by a remarkable outburst of applause, in which Her Majesty the Queen took a conspicuous part. The course of the opera was broken, so that the whole audience might give her speedy assurance of their loyalty and admiration, and Melba was palpably touched by the warmth of her welcome. Throughout the evening, ovation succeeded ovation; at the close of the third act the applause seemed as though it would never end, and after the performance, when she passed to her carriage, hundreds of people waited to give her a final cheer as she drove away laden with flowers.

Every critic in London testified to her unrivalled voice and art, and the majority, as on many a preceding occasion, proclaimed that evening's impersonation of Mimi as finer than any she had ever given. New terms of praise were found to express public appreciation of her gifts, and there were many acknowledgments of the ever-growing variety of her expression, the added force and conviction of her

acting, and increasing roundness and richness of her voice, especially in the lower notes—tributes peculiarly welcome to Melba, who is ever striving after artistic progress.

Among the many congratulations she received was a characteristic message from Mr. Oscar Hammerstein, the New York impresario, who came over from Paris to hear her, and who wrote: "Nobody sings like Melba, and nobody ever will." The general opinion of the London musical world may be said to have been voiced in Mr. Benjamin William Findon's summary: "Melba reigns. Her vocal triumph last night leaves her in the position she has occupied hitherto at Covent Garden. The radiant planet of the Antipodes is still the clearest crystal star of the aurora borealis. People have wondered how this new artist and that new artist would compare with Melba when she was once again heard at Covent Garden. There is no comparison. Melba reigns! She reigns by reason of the gorgeous quality of her voice, of tones which suggest a liquid blend of corn and oil. Faultlessly pure, exquisitely rich, and one might almost say immaculately true, describes best her singing last night, when she appeared for the first time this season to a house crowded in all parts. I put aside the ovation which greeted her, the prolonged applause that attended the fall of the curtain. That told me nothing I did not feel. My dominant idea was—Melba reigns. And in saying this I do not depreciate the other brilliant artists who are brought to our notice by the generous management of Covent Garden. Each in her way is possessed of qualifications that call forth our warmest admiration, and to each is due the cordial appreciation of those they seek

to please. But Nature takes precedence of Art, for Nature in her luxuriant beauty includes all that Art simulates and imitates. It is too late in the day to criticize 'La Bohème,' or Melba's interpretation of the pathetic rôle of Mimi. Both are familiar masterpieces at Covent Garden, and both are familiar to its habitués. Last night, however, Melba surpassed herself. There may have been a latent feeling that she was called upon to make a supreme effort to maintain her sovereignty as the Queen of Opera ; the effort was made, and she enthroned herself anew in the hearts of those who know how to judge and appreciate the magical charm of a voice unsurpassed since the days of Patti's prime."

It was a great occasion, a notable celebration of an unequalled record, and Melba was manifestly pleased. Her triumph was complete, her supremacy undisturbed. She accepted the flattering situation as the realization of an expectation on which she had confidently counted, yet in her gratification there was no shadow of ostentation.

Like all public characters, Madame Melba receives an embarrassing number of letters of all kinds from unknown correspondents, but in America this tribute has become the more puzzling because the writers often begin their communications in terms of friendship, even affection, and it is often only possible to find the letter is from a stranger after reading almost to the end of a lengthy epistle. Many of these letters are so full of pathos that it is impossible to peruse them unmoved, and on that account Melba never examines any of them immediately before a performance. The following samples may give a fair idea of the variety in a day's mail :

[*Personal.*]

"NEWTON, N.J.

"DEAR MADAME MELBA,

"I am a musician, composer of beautiful music, a singer and pianist, and I have worked hard and long for my three little daughters God has left me to look after. I can read any vocal or instrumental music, but I am poor, and I can't come to New York to practise my voice, because I haven't the means, and no chance here in the country, and I wanted to hear you sing so much. Won't you listen to me, and help me to come, and listen to me sing, and let me hear you? It would make me so happy, and if you could see these dear little children. I know you will help me when you hear my story of hardships. I haven't the strength to work hard any more, and I am a gifted singer. God gave me a voice that only like yourself has. Will you help me? Oh, I trust you will let me come and see you! I am a Christian woman; lived here twenty years, and you need not be afraid. I have tried to give concerts, but you know you must have a name. Mr. —— heard me a month ago, and he thought I was wonderful; but I have tried to get the money to come, but can't up here. Perhaps you know of people that, if they knew I was all right, would help me. Don't be afraid of me, I am no crank or fraud. If you will listen and let me come, God will reward you. I want to hear you sing, and want you to hear me. —— has published a two-step for me. Please get it; it has my picture on the title-page.

"Respectfully, ——.

"P.S.—If you can hear me, and say I can sing, you know, of course, people love you, and that will

help me. If you answer I can see you, I will give you reference as to my worthiness.

"I would send you one of the sheets of music, but haven't any at hand, and was afraid you might not be there if I did not hurry."

"NEW JERSEY.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I will not waste time apologizing to you for writing this note, for I know you will not regret having read it. I will make it as concise as possible. My one ambition since childhood has been to be a prima donna, but I am only a poor orphan with no one to help me. I have a good contralto voice, and am twenty-eight years of age.

"Knowing of your noble generosity in the past, I take the liberty to beg of you to do something for me, whereby you would be the means of perpetuating one of God's noblest gifts.

"Trusting that you will consider this note seriously, and not assign it to the waste-basket.

"I beg of you again as my last resort; do not let me have appealed to your generosity in vain.

"Thanking you again and again,

"I remain,

"Your humble admirer, ——."

"CHICAGO, U.S.A.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I have a fine canary bird that sings a beautiful song unlike other birds. I am going to have a fine singer sing like him. I come to you first because you are the finest. I would not sell the bird for no money, but I am going to have his song

copied. I am a poor woman, and I ask $5,000 (five thousand dollars) for his song. I presume you think the price is high, but I expect to get it. Mrs. Sage is doing so much with her money, perhaps you could induce her to furnish the money for you. I love my bird; I would not part with him for ten times the money.

"In my young days I was a fine singer and musician, but reverses came and I drifted away. If you would get me that much money I could study and take up my music again. Do not think that I am out of my mind; I am a sane woman, and know what I am writing. You may laugh about this letter and throw it away, but if you do not take the chance, some one else will. You would have to practise with my bird to learn his songs. I had hoped to see you, so I could say things plainer.

"Hoping to hear from you, ——."

"NEW YORK.

"The exquisite loveliness of your voice last evening was so far beyond all earthly beauty, I felt as if the heavens had opened and I had come near to God. I longed to kneel down and worship.

"Your singing is above art—it is religion.

"MARGARET."

"MADAM,

"Pardon a young librettist for appealing to you.

"I am in despair. For ten long years since my boyhood I have been hugging this scenario, waiting for a future Wagner. But I know no composer of even ordinary merit. Will you forgive me for

enclosing the scenario—just the bare plot? If it appeals to you, and you could bring it to the notice of some great composer, I shall be eternally grateful to you. What woman is there in this generation, save you, who could sing the heroine's death-song as she stands upon Delhi's burning wall before flinging herself on the flames beneath? I could write the libretto in my heart's blood, for I am descended from one of the actors in this historic tragedy enacted in India seven centuries ago—*i.e.*, a collateral branch of the heroine's dynasty."

"LONDON,
"*15th November*, 1907.

"DEAR MADAME MELBA,

"Five years ago I came to London, and, as with all Australians, my fear of the unknown evil of this great city was my dominant feeling. Then, on my first Saturday night I went to hear you sing, and you stirred some depth in me that made me oblivious to all personal danger—even to the fact that at the close of the performance I had got separated from my two companions; for I was alone in the opera-house waiting, hoping for you to come back once more. One of my friends had the latchkey, the other had my purse; yet, when I gradually realized the position, I was utterly indifferent. Nothing mattered since I had heard you sing. I gave my cabman a ring, and told him to call in the morning. Then, as I could not make anyone hear, I went down the area steps. Some thoughts are more refreshing than sleep, and these were mine till the dawn came.

"Many times since I have heard you, for now

with my daughter I live in London, and to us both the experience of your singing is always the same—an exaltation that soars above Life, or even Death.

"I trust you will soon come back to reign over us as aforetime, and bring confusion to those enemies begotten by your greatness.

"Some day we may meet. Till then and after, may the God who made you, He of your Scottish forebears, keep you safely. With the love of two you have never seen,

"Faithfully your admirer,
"BARBARA BAYNTON."*

* Author of the remarkable novel "Human Toll."

CHAPTER XXXIX

"The Australian soprano's voice is the most even and beautiful I have ever heard. When in her best vein, Madame Melba's voice is matchless. It has a curious impersonal quality, or rather a fixed personal quality, which varies so little that it seems absolute and impersonal, like the sound of a fixed-tone wood-wind instrument. The notes of her voice have often been compared with the perfectly matched pearls of a rare necklace. All have the same musical shape and size, and the same beautiful colour and lustre. As absolute singing, nothing I have ever heard can be likened to Madame Melba's delivery of 'Caro Nome,' or the Mad Scene from 'Lucia di Lammermoor.' Her voice appeals to the type of intellectualized sensuousness which finds delight in exquisite goldsmith's work. When you hear Melba sing 'Caro Nome' you do not care whether Gilda is supposed to be in love with the Duke or not. You just sit back in your stall, and your ears are entranced with beautiful sound."—EDWARD ALGERNON BAUGHAN (May 1908).

AFTER noting down some individual particular as a "Melba" characteristic, one finds her so often acting in opposition to it, that there is a strong disposition to withdraw the descriptive attribute; yet she is so honest and so straightforward that it seems an absurdity to suggest any difficulty in summarizing her personality. Still, in her case extremes do meet, and with this union of apparently irreconcilable qualities, the looping-up of paradoxes, there exists that something which is so potent in the fixing and holding of strong personal regard.

The late Archbishop Corrigan, while explaining the contradiction in her deductions on one occasion, said: "But, my dear Madame, you are not logical." "I am at least as logical as your Grace, for you are seeking logic in an artist," was her answer.

Intolerant of subterfuge, Melba demands from her friends the same unfaltering sincerity which she gives them; and at a time when so much is sacrificed to opportunism, especially by those who fill a prominent place in the fashionable world, it is exhilarating to find a woman like this great singer deaf to the call of expediency. Her artistic eminence, entailing as it does a continuous demand for expressed opinions, might in itself be regarded as a barrier to the exercise of that honesty which is so strong within her; but unusual moral courage, tempered by kindness of heart, gives her easy egress from what to a weaker personality would be a prison-house of enshackling circumstance. Holding strong convictions, and ready to employ an unflinching candour in their championship, she is naturally not immune from the liability of occasionally having her motives misinterpreted.

Where there is no matter of vital interest at issue, Melba can be silent where speech is sought from her, if she has nothing encouraging to say. If praise is due, she gives it warmly; but no one has ever yet heard her descend to flattery or empty compliment. Such a woman is sure to be misunderstood by some who batten on the affectations of our superficial modernity. Time and again throughout her career instances have arisen where she could have added to her professional progress, her worldly well-being, or her personal popularity, by silence or equivoca-

Photo. M. Sherwell, Clarke, 117 Ebury Street, S.W.

A FAVOURITE PROFILE PICTURE OF MELBA

tion, but she has refused to profit by any sacrifice of principle.

Of her it can be said without reserve that she has never been known to purchase any benefit at the price of truth. The most intimate of her friends are occasionally offended by her sincerity and vehemence of expression, but in the succeeding moments they are redeemed from rancour by the frank generosity of her atonement, the knowledge of her enduring kindness.

Many persons have sought advancement in Melba's favour by reciting to her uncharitable stories concerning artists or others supposed to be her rivals in musical or social eminence. For such vulgar tactics she has no toleration, and always interrupts impatiently with: "I never allow anyone to come to me with spiteful gossip." It can be readily gathered that a woman like Melba is not consumed with any vain desire to transform all her acquaintances into friends; indeed, she is careful to draw a marked distinction between the two phases of association. Like all people who reach great heights of fame, she is sure to have some enemies, but with her genial toleration and broad view of life, she is too much of the laughing philosopher to pine over the inevitable. It is equally safe to assume that there are some people towards whom she entertains feeings of antipathy, but concerning those who have injured or maligned her, Melba prefers to maintain a dignified silence. She never frets herself into seething virulence, and if she does not wholly forgive, she most certainly endeavours wholly to forget those whose personality is distasteful to her—an endeavour entirely successful, if one may judge by her habitual insouciance.

Whatever faults Melba possesses—and being human, she has her share—they are the faults that one might expect to find in a big, generous nature. She could never stoop to the small, mean things of life, and has never been known to shirk the consequences of her own acts. So much might be looked for from one who has ever been more ready to seek the beam in her own eye, rather than the mote in the eye of a friend ; a woman who has sincerely striven to shape her life in accordance with her favourite maxim, "Live and let live."

The appreciation and enthusiasm with which she enters into the work and successes of her artistic colleagues, and the generosity with which she encourages the aspirations of students on the threshold of a career, are among her finest qualities, and the exercise of these attributes constitutes a stimulating pleasure for those who are privileged to enjoy her friendship.

Her almost incredible indifference to the rivalries of contemporary singers is not the result of any depreciation of their artistic qualities, but springs from an unfaltering, yet by no means arrogant, faith in her own ability to maintain supremacy in the sphere of musical activity wherein so many hold her peerless.

In all that pertains to the dignity of the musical art Melba has ever shown an exemplary zeal. Her admiration for Adelina Patti, Milka Ternina, Emma Nordica, Schumann Heink, Jean de Reszke, Emma Calvé, Joseph Joachim, Ignace Paderewski, Arthur Nikisch, Pol Plançon, Hans Richter, to mention but a few of those with whom she has been closely associated, is sure to lead her into a flow of warm-hearted

comment. On one occasion in Paris, after seeing Sarah Bernhardt in "Camille," Melba took a string of pearls from her neck, and, in token of gratitude for the performance, clasped them round the throat of the famous tragédienne.

It has become almost a truism that no great singer ever gives material help to a lesser-known artist whose voice belongs to the same class as his or her own, and that no prima donna has ever been known to spare enthusiasm for the art comrades who sing the same rôles in which she has become famous. In Melba the operatic world has found a striking exception, manifest on the one hand by her more than liberal encouragement to Pauline Donalda, Elizabeth Parkina, Emma Trentini, and on the other by her generous estimate of the work of Adelina Patti, Marcella Sembrich, and Lilian Nordica. During the opera seasons of 1905-06 and 1906-07, both in London and America, much of Melba's time, which she might reasonably be expected to have given to recreation or rest, was cheerfully set aside for lessons to Donalda, Parkina, and Trentini. In addition to these opera-singers, Melba gave, and continues to give, invaluable help towards the training of different young concert artists, especially to those whose financial means are of the smallest. No singer of the present or past generation has been identified as Melba is with the encouragement of aspiring musicians, and the names of her protégées are legion. Her time, influence, and money have been freely and continuously given in smoothing the way for talented students, and in spite of numerous disappointments due to the want of health or perseverance, or other causes in connection with these

beginners, Melba's interest in the novices of her art continues unimpaired. It is only those who have been present at the informal lessons which she takes it on herself to give ambitious singers who can fully realize how completely she has mastered all the intricacies of the vocal art. Her insistence on the necessity of an understanding of the composer's meaning, and, again, her strong plea for a fair knowledge of the anatomy of the throat, as necessary preliminaries to the reasonable interpretation of any vocal music, come as a surprise to many who think that the subtleties of breathing, phrasing, tone production, and expression can be secured by entirely superficial study.

Curious testimony of the reputation Melba enjoys as the patron of young singers was forthcoming during her last American season, when a Marchesi pupil who had been engaged by Mr. Hammerstein sent the prima donna a little piece of embroidery as an expression of her thanks. Melba, as it happened, had done nothing to secure the novice's preferment.

The noble singing of Ternina and Schumann Heink have always appealed to her in a special way, and she has often described them both as goddesses, transformed, deified, by the transcendent beauty of their art. Perhaps the fact that she began her professional career as a "star," and did not work her way up from a subordinate position, may have robbed her of any reason for the alleged usual jealousies.

In the privacy of her own home, even the gramophone reproductions of the voices of Enrico Caruso, Schumann Heink, Scotti, and Pol Plançon have been known to make such an appeal to her interest,

that she has often left her letters or her books and gone to the room where some of her guests may have been amusing themselves with the instrument, to express her admiration and delight.

Owing to the unique position which Melba has now held for several years at Covent Garden, it has become the fashion in certain circles to ascribe to her great power and activity in matters affecting the management, more especially the engagement of the artists. The admirers of any singer who has not been able to win a lengthy engagement at Covent Garden always attribute their favourite's rejection to Madame Melba's interference; and, on the other hand, the enemies of any artist who has been fortunate enough to retain a position there for any extended term are always ready to assert that this good fortune is the result of Melba's unreasonable preference.

While always ready to express a favourable opinion on the merits of any deserving singer, Melba never allows herself to pronounce adverse judgment on opera candidates, nor to do anything that would harass or hamper the managerial functions of the directors, whose confidence and esteem she has held for so many years, and whose task is already of ample difficulty without the further handicap of extraneous interposition.

In commemoration of the completion of her twenty years' association with the Covent Garden Royal Opera, Melba gave a charity matinée at that house on June 24, which was honoured by the presence of the King and Queen and a distinguished audience, and which resulted in her handing over to the London Hospital a cheque for £2,000 ($10,000). The pro-

gramme consisted of the first act of "Madame Butterfly," in which Mademoiselle Destinn impersonated the title rôle; and the first act of "Traviata," with Melba as Violetta. To show appreciation of the brilliant Bohemian's assistance, Melba, though tired and anxious from the necessary extra work incidental to the occasion, went to the opera-house in time to hear the whole of the act from Puccini's work.

On the evening before the matinée, the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland entertained a small company at a ball in honour of the King and Queen. It was the most brilliant private function of the season, and Melba was among those invited to meet Their Majesties. Strongly appreciating the enjoyment of elegant social intercourse, Melba's desire to attend a soirée of such unusual interest must have been great, yet long-practised discipline made it possible for her to renounce the pleasure without making apparent her disappointment. Duty to the public demanded that she should give them of her best next day, and she helped that possibility by retiring early.

The matinée was marked by a great manifestation of enthusiasm, and the final scene, when Melba stood in the centre of the stage surrounded by flowers and faced by a joyously cheering throng, was one that must have left a vivid impression on all who witnessed it.

To the audience the smiling heroine of that great ovation was an enviable figure, and no one would suspect that under all the gaiety and enthusiasm there were circumstances of somewhat pathetic isolation. All those nearest and dearest to her were far away on that eventful afternoon. Her son

was lying ill at Marienbad, and a whole world's length separated her from the father and sisters and brothers, whose presence would have been the crowning glory in the apotheosis of her career.

For those who happily are familiar with her art, as well as for those who know it not, the foregoing record of her career will, it is hoped, be not entirely without value.

LIST OF OPERAS IN WHICH MELBA HAS APPEARED

	Rôle.	*Opera.*	*Composer.*
1.	Elsa	Lohengrin	Wagner
2.	Elizabeth	Tannhäuser	Wagner
3.	Brünnhilde	Siegfried	Wagner
4.	Violetta	La Traviata	Verdi
5.	Gilda	Rigoletto	Verdi
6.	Aïda	Aïda	Verdi
7.	Rosina	Barber of Seville	Verdi
8.	Desdemona	Otello	Verdi
9.	Juliet	Romeo and Juliet	Gounod
10.	Marguerite	Faust	Gounod
11.	Marguerite	The Damnation of Faust*	Berlioz
12.	Hélène	Hélène	Saint-Saëns
13.	Elaine	Elaine	Bemberg
14.	Mimi	La Bohème	Puccini
15.	Lucia	Lucia di Lammermoor	Donizetti
16.	Ophélie	Hamlet	Ambroise Thomas
17.	Manon	Manon Lescaut	Massenet
18.	Nedda	Pagliacci	Leoncavallo
19.	Micaela	Carmen	Bizet
20.	Margherita de Valois	Les Huguenots	Meyerbeer
21.	Lakmé	Lakmé	Delibes
22.	Luisa	I Rantzau	Mascagni
23.	Semiramide	Semiramide	Rossini
24.	Esmeralda	Esmeralda	Goring Thomas
25.	Infanta	Le Cid	Massenet

* Dramatic version.

MELBA'S ADVICE ON THE SELECTION OF MUSIC AS A PROFESSION

It having been represented to me that a public expression of my views on the question of young aspirants entering on the study of music in foreign lands might serve in some measure as a corrective to the admitted unwarranted exodus, I gladly join my voice with those who have already endeavoured to remedy an evil the extent of which is little known outside the circle of the victims themselves. Where an English or American student of music has adequate financial means and a reasonable quota of common sense, I would strongly recommend a period of foreign study, for whether the natural musical endowment of such a student be small or great, nothing but benefit can result from the experience. The youth or maiden of circumscribed talents will soon be made to realize the limitations of his or her qualifications, and while this advent of truth may be claimed to have a salutary effect on the mediocrity, it also invariably awakens the greatly gifted to that broader understanding which is the basis of genuine art.

The message, however, which I am now sending to the British and American student is particularly addressed to the inexperienced girls of the Empire

and of the great Western Republic who, without the necessary financial means, and having no friendly circle in the foreign cities to which they journey, too often become the victims of their own temerity, and help to add to the prosperity of the ever-increasing circle of unprincipled agents and teachers. Just here I should like to say that few people show greater patience with, and kindness to, the most obscure of their clients than do the established concert and opera agents and teachers of Europe and the United Kingdom; but, unfortunately, it is not by these men and women of repute that the over-anxious and ill-equipped student of music elects to be advised. The essential elements of the position make it otherwise.

To the young American or English girl hungering for musical study in Europe I can only repeat what I have been already called upon to say to the young people of Australia, where the abundance of admirable voices has led to something like a human stampede to the old country. There, as in America, it has become the custom to send to Italy, France, Germany, or England any girl or youth who exhibits some degree of musical precocity. The circumstances in both countries are analogous. In the majority of cases the American amateur is sent out on a mission of research and conquest, through the ignorant enthusiasm and prejudice of relatives and friends who have no means of knowing the moral and physical humiliation and suffering to which their incompetent advice helps to consign those who are its dupes.

Britain and America have contributed a creditable contingent to the ranks of famous artists, and may be expected to consistently continue, even improve on, that contribution. Yet it is incidental to these suc-

cesses that there exists a multitude of failures. In the contemplation of those who have reaped a lavish measure of success, the lamentably and incomparably greater number who sink to obscurity—or worse—are allowed to pass unnoticed. Only those who have succeeded are considered, and emulation of the elect supplies a never-ending and ill-conditioned procession of novices in pursuit of ready honours. If there exists a royal road to triumph, it is found almost as rarely as the blossoms of the century plant—too seldom to be of any use as a practical help to the vast majority, most of whom make their search blindfold.

The average English and American student, like those of my own country, arrives in Europe without the measure of talent and the supply of money indispensable to a European career (for even those specially gifted require financial means to tide them comfortably over the necessary term of study and waiting), and in numerous cases the unfortunate aspirant sinks to a deplorable condition of poverty and despair. In the different large foreign cities, I have known, and still know, numerous instances where young Britishers and Americans have arrived full of ardent hopes, fostered by the foolish laudation of careless or ignorant friends, but who, in a condition of penury, are ready to accept relief from any kindly disposed source. A very brief interval too often separates the heyday of their joyous anticipation from the gloom of their shattered dreams.

The lot of these unsuccessful students is peculiarly hard, as they have generally cut themselves adrift from home and friends and old associations, and journeyed great distances, to find the unavoidable

goal of failure, through the routine of misery and privation. The students who are not fortunate very naturally try to hide all evidence of their failure, especially in the land of their birth, and in this way hundreds of other aspirants are led to stumble on, under the old illusion as to easy laurels.

Little more than a year ago, Mr. James E. Dunning, the United States Consul at Milan, through the Department of Commerce and Labour at Washington, brought before the American people the calamitous condition of numbers of young Americans who had travelled to Italy in quest of musical fame. In his moderate and well-considered report, Mr. Dunning dwelt on the hardships to which these young people are constantly reduced through the inherent difficulties of their arduous undertaking—difficulties intensified a thousandfold by the snares spread for them by the designing hangers-on of the profession. What is true of Milan is true in a somewhat similar degree of Paris, Berlin, London, Vienna, and the other great cities, where private and official sources are constantly being appealed to for the assistance of these bankrupt students.

The germ of the trouble is the over-confidence of the aspirant who refuses to be advised, and declines to profit by the wretched experience of others who have tried and failed. Each novice, in the thraldom of inexperience, believes that his or her case will be the exception to the quoted rule, and to those who point out that passable proficiency in amateur efforts may not be capable of the expansion necessary to professional success, an impatient ear is turned by the ambitious though inept student.

Carried away by the outward glamour of a success-

ful artist's life, they set at naught the counsel of those who would guide them, attribute the sober views of their advisers to over-anxiety, and invariably suggest that it is such interference that has wrecked the career of many an embryo genius. Of the many called, they may be of the few chosen, is their argument; and so they rush on, learning too late the supreme difficulties, if not the hopelessness, of their quest.

Different other causes contribute to this regrettable state of affairs, among them the exaggerated importance which many people, besides the performer, attach to the satisfactory rendering of a little drawing-room music, the facility with which accounts of these and other petty little efforts are circulated as successes in some newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic, and the general but decreasing unwillingness of the American and English public — as represented by their resident managers—to accept musicians of purely local renown in the most important music rôles. These three causes are in the main responsible for the numbers of disheartened dependents who, year after year, make a most undesirable addition to the American and British colonies in the chief centres of Europe.

The girl or youth—but more especially the girl—whose accomplishments expand to their utmost attractiveness under the genial influence of the home circle, is too often the one who is least fitted for the struggles, the labours, the sacrifices of a professional career, especially when entered on in a foreign land. The very qualities which are her strength in the world of her sympathetic friends become her weakness in the too often blighting sphere of cold, or

designing, or indifferent strangers. It is not easy to imagine a sadder lot than that of the young musical aspirants whose once ardent hopes are wrecked in an alien land. All their efforts have been directed towards an illusion, and the training on which they have spent their available time and money, instead of being a help, is an actual hindrance to their advance in any of the rougher walks of life. In this way valuable human energy is wasted, and individuals and families who might have been made happy through its proper direction are reduced to humiliating, even degrading, conditions of dependence. The parents and friends of any average amateur of music should well weigh their words before encouraging any such performer to enter into a professional life, either at home or abroad. The satisfactory rendering of a solo at a family *soirée* or local concert is not sufficient indication of qualifications for a career where brains, courage, tact, industry, resolution, and physical vigour are at least as essential to success as a beautiful voice or exceptional technique.

I would, therefore, advise greater wisdom in the selection of candidates. More care should be taken not to send abroad students whose talents are never likely to justify the enterprise, and in no case should the novices be allowed to depart without sufficient money to carry them in comfort through an extended term of study and probation.

Then, again, Press opinions on students' efforts at concerts got up for experimental purposes are almost always, and of necessity, misleading. The young singers or players naturally select the two or three numbers in which they are calculated to appear to most advantage; no performer likely to clash with

them in any way is given a place on the programme; the hall is packed with interested friends whose enthusiasm creates a false atmosphere, which not unreasonably leads the less experienced critic—who is generally selected for minor events—into writing a notice somewhat more encouraging than his calmer judgment would endorse.

The arranged absence of any superior talent, the ardent applause of prejudiced friends, and the kindly opinion of a critic ready to make the best of what to him is an unimportant occasion, are the points incidental to these entertainments that count towards the summary of their success.

One of these concerts is often allowed to dictate the decision as to a career, yet they are almost always but well-meant efforts at forcing a selection which should never be made.

When the selection has been made, however, and the young aspirant goes abroad, and becomes the centre of one or two similar musical exploits in Paris, London, or Berlin, it is then that special evil is wrought by the misleading reports sent to the homeland by careless but kindly correspondents. The young amateurs who remained at home, and who had no very flattering opinion of those who had been sent abroad, on reading of the latter's success, form a hasty opinion as to the ease with which the great musical world is conquered, and straightway enter on the task themselves. The ubiquitous duties of foreign correspondents too often make it incumbent on them to accept second-hand information, and in this manner even the most conscientious among them are sometimes misled. I would urge on all contributors to the Press the wisdom of carefully editing

every story of musical success which happens to be outside their own personal knowledge. In this way I believe much could be done to alleviate the conditions to which Mr. Consul Dunning and others have called attention.

As for the American apathy towards the native-born musician whose gifts have not been sponsored by the European public, it reveals a condition which has a parallel at least in all English-speaking communities. I suppose few would dispute that the greatest of American artists are those who have won recognition in foreign lands, and in that way the preference for such, however much to be regretted, may be said to be based on the selection epitomized in "the survival of the fittest." In the days to come, when music as an inspiration and recreation of the people will have an older pedigree in Great Britain and America, the public of these countries will probably be more ready to abide by their own verdict in the creation of their favourites, and perhaps show some of that ardent preference for the artists of their own race which is manifested by the peoples of Italy, France, and Germany.

The higher the standard of the British and American music institutions, and the greater the efficiency of the professors engaged therein, the sooner will the element of unreason be minimized in the British and American preference for music artists of foreign reputation. England and America are already fortunate in the possession of great facilities for the cultivation of music, but there are numerous opportunities for the extension and higher development of these facilities, many of them provided for in the newly formed British Musical League

and in Madame Nordica's admirable American proposition. In her proposal there is the elemental basis of a great national conservatoire, which would supply local students with additional stimulus, and save many of them from the disappointments and hardships which so often fall to their lot in foreign cities.

I imagine that some of Madame Nordica's critics have taken the reference to Bayreuth too literally. Personally, I see no reason why an American national home for opera, embodying some of the best features of Bayreuth, should not be a matter of accomplishment, and as such become a splendid help to great numbers of students. But my interest lies specially in the phase of her scheme which deals directly with tuition. It is impossible to outline exactly every detail in the preliminary summary of such an undertaking, but the setting up of any centre of musical education formulated on lines that aim at the highest results—always remembering my strong plea for individual, in preference to class, tuition—and where the greatest teachers of Europe might be induced to preside for certain terms, is a step that should appeal largely to the American people. It would give the student, the manager, and the public greater confidence in the home-developed singer or instrumentalist, and in this way alone would do something to correct the unreasonable exodus of music aspirants with which I am specially dealing.

I am also glad to have this opportunity of expressing my interest in Mr. Henry Savage's plan, which has resulted in the establishment of a Paris bureau where American musicians in Europe are able to secure desired information and advice, and I hope

some English enthusiast may be induced to follow his example. At this centre Mr. Savage's staff keep a record of all young students arriving from America, and provide lists of teachers, schools, agents, managers, coaches, accompanists, translators, diction masters, and places of abode to which they may go assured of fair dealing and friendly reception. As matters have existed up to now, even the students of exceptional talents, on the completion of their musical education, have too often drifted into sad obscurity for want of competent guidance.

Still harder has been the fate of the student whose gifts are but of the average order. Should the bureau be continued on the lines which Mr. Savage's own high personal reputation warrants one in assuming, there can be no doubt but that it will confer incalculable benefit on numbers of worthy young Americans, whose ambition leads them to respond to the uncertain call of European competition.

For all young British and American amateurs having sufficient means to see them in comfort through a term of foreign study, but more especially those possessing exceptional natural gifts, I, of course, strongly urge the advantage of a term of residence and research in the great music centres of the old world. The study of the French, German, and Italian languages, so necessary to the operatic artist, is always more thoroughly carried out in the countries where they are the native tongue. The chances to study under the most famous masters, and the opportunities to hear the greatest works interpreted by the greatest artists, are also comparatively easy and numerous in Europe, while in the atmosphere of

the famous seats of music there is an incentive which no other condition can so surely supply.

For the student of mediocre talent and little money these advantages, however, are entirely overshadowed by the privations and disappointments which, in their case, are but the preliminary to failure. I repeat, then, that the greatest discretion should be exercised in the nomination of students for European study, and I insist that even an unusual voice or admirable technique is not in itself sufficient to warrant an undertaking, the success of which, apart from liberal expenditure, also demands several exceptional qualities of body and mind.

MELBA ON THE SCIENCE OF SINGING

MUSICAL knowledge continues to spread with rapidity and effect, but I think the greater chances of success thus opened to numbers of followers is very largely—too largely—discounted by the scores of inept executants and professors who, without even the most ordinary qualifications, proclaim themselves teachers and interpreters of an art which demands in its apostles the fitness of very liberal attainments. What should be a learned profession is recklessly overcrowded by ignorant exponents, who are inconceivably accepted even by those who would vehemently resent any semblance of charlatanism in any other serious calling. The unqualified performer is the natural result of the unqualified teacher, and while no test of ability is exacted from the vast body of professors, so long will music suffer through the ignorance of its adherents.

Many amateurs, and especially women, are no doubt attracted to the profession of music by the high, perhaps extravagant, rates of remuneration paid to successful performers and teachers. It is something of an anomaly that a field where the monetary appreciation is so high should be the one where proven fitness is not essential to entry. If we had more competent teachers, we should have more

great singers; and I shall never cease to urge the necessity of placing the tuition of singing on a more exclusive basis than that on which it now exists. The acknowledged professors in all the great cities should resort to some means to shut out from their ranks the tyros whose research too often does not extend beyond the superficial smattering gleaned in a year or two from questionable authorities.

In all other learned professions—and even in mechanical callings—different technical tests are imposed before a person is accepted as an authority in that profession or calling. In music the insistence on any test is, unhappily, not the rule, but the exception; especially is this the case in English-speaking colonies and communities. Casual observation, backed up by unlimited confidence, too often suffices to win a large measure of public support, the charlatan, by the very essence of his method, having a much more easy course than the cultured specialist, who has made a heavy outlay of time, talent, and money in obtaining qualifying knowledge.

It is my practice to hear as many young singers as possible in the different cities I visit, also in London, the city of my home, and everywhere I am grieved by the injury I see done through ignorant tuition, for in the vast majority of cases I find methods in vogue which are entirely at variance with the health of the delicate vocal cords. We do not accept tuition in architecture, chemistry, or law from any casual dabbler in these professions, but we welcome the gospel of vocalization from those who have not even a perfunctory acquaintance with the science of singing. Students should remember that a good general knowledge of music does not imply a knowledge of

voice-production based on scientific principles, and until they come to look for that scientific basis in their teachers, nondescript singers will continue to be crowded on a patient, perhaps culpable, public. Physiological principles are the necessary groundwork of correct vocalization. Through them defects are more surely detected and remedied, and the restoration or development of a maimed or immature organ definitely achieved. Physiology is absolutely essential to preserve the health of the vocal organs and protect the voice from injurious influences ; but in saying this it must be understood that I am dealing with the science, not the soul, of song.

Having said so much about incompetent teachers, I return to the question of inept pupils. Too many girls and youths are encouraged to adopt music as a profession merely because of its gentility as a means of livelihood, or because their voices have contributed to the pleasure of the family circle, where the compliments of a few relations or friends are taken as sufficient warranty of fitness for a professional career. Before young vocal aspirants decide on this difficult undertaking, I strongly recommend the seeking of high and unprejudiced counsel, preferably from a singer who is familiar with the requirements and difficulties of the calling, and who is intimate with the conditions which obtain in the great centres of music. In endeavouring to arrive at a decision, it is well to remember that there are more failures through lack of common sense than through lack of talent. The person who aims at a public career, especially in opera, must have character supported by reason and control, otherwise the progress which a good voice and certain technical knowledge

temporarily insure always stops short of great results. I freely acknowledge the value of opportunity, and if opportunity knocks but once at most men's doors, it is ostensibly of primary importance to be prepared for that call. Even that *rara avis*, the born singer, might dissipate Heaven-sent gifts for want of opportunity, while the vocalist of highly cultivated talent might never emerge from obscurity without it. Conditions of musical knowledge and physical health being equal, the student of alert mind, who is prepared for her chance, and goes some way to meet it, is the one who is surest of success.

Mental lethargy is fatal to advancement, and no young musician has a right to rely for preferment on the exertions of others. Those who have attained the qualifications of technical equipment essential to success, and who do not achieve it, are generally those who fail to strike out for themselves. Industry as well as knowledge is necessary to the successful novice, and no one is justified in the belief that she or he will sing by inspiration, no matter how prodigal Nature may have been in the bestowal of her gifts. And if diligence is essential for the highest development of the born singer, it must be regarded as of a thousandfold greater importance to the vocalist whose endowments fall short of that inspired creature.

One of the first fields for the employment of the beginner's energy is physiology. No student should be content to proceed without gaining a reasonable knowledge of the anatomy of the throat and the sensitive and complicated physical mechanism that produce the singing voice. For myself, I at one time became so completely absorbed in this study that I could practically neither think nor speak of anything

else. An understanding of the delicate functions of voice mechanism is a rational and logical plea for perfection in singing, and was always embodied in the methods of the old Italian masters, whose general accuracy has been reduced to a much surer science by some of their present-day followers. Those who know the structure of the larynx and the muscular mechanism of the parts called into action by the production of the voice, will find themselves in possession of knowledge essential to correct attack. The application of the air-blast to the vocal cords should be a detail of exact science, not a haphazard circumstance. In a warm general recommendation of the old Italian method, I do not hesitate to condemn the white voice and tremolo so favoured by some Italian singers.

Great success in singing is impossible to the vocalist who does not thoroughly understand breathing, attack, the use of the registers, the structure and functions of the parts above the voice-box, and the relation of chest expansion to the production of tone. As I have so often said, a beautiful voice is only the basis of vocal progress, in the perfection of which correct breathing is the greatest technical essential. Faulty breathing can even negative the expression of noble thought which a soulful, but incompetent, performer may be struggling to put into his work. It is utterly impossible to demonstrate in song the beauty of either a singer's voice or mind without proper breath control. Tone, expression, resonance, phrasing, are all dependent on respiration, and girls and boys of musical tastes, even when too young to be permitted the free use of their voices, should be fully taught the principles of taking breath.

During the years of childhood and adolescence the science of breathing is a peculiarly appropriate study, for, other conditions apart, correct breathing is highly conducive to good health, and owing to the greater elasticity of the body during the growing years, the chest is then much more readily developed and expanded. As the diaphragm is the chief muscle of inspiration, special care should be devoted to any exercises that promote its strength. Expiration is considerably more difficult of control than inspiration, and consequently calls for the most careful practice.

Exact vibration of the vocal cords can never be secured where the breathing is hurried or faulty, and any conditions likely to produce either should be rigidly avoided, particularly at the time of a singer's first entrance on the stage or concert platform, which even under the happiest circumstances is always a moment of nervousness and doubt. The timid singer will always find her forces strengthened on such occasions by taking a few very deep breaths on stepping before the public, and by choosing for the opening number—where a choice is possible—music that is free from exacting initial bars.

To my mind, a girl should never enter on the serious routine of voice culture until she is seventeen years of age. Before that time even a moderate share of work is likely to interfere with the proper development of the vocal organs, and perhaps cause certain injury. Only the other day Madame Mathilde Marchesi recalled the fact that the too frequent use of her marvellous voice in youth had prematurely impaired the middle register of Jenny Lind. If one so divinely gifted as she suffered through prodigal

use of the voice during her early years, how imperative must be the necessity for care in the case of those whose endowments fall immeasurably below her unique standard !

On the other hand, we have to-day several artists of world-wide fame who, because of a reasonable economy of their vocal means in their young days, and their consistent adherence to a correct method, are singing as freshly now as they did twenty years ago, while others, who started with equal or greater natural endowments, have become painfully defective in their artistic work through ignorant use of the vocal organs.*

A most helpful factor in the study of music, especially for an operatic career, is a knowledge of foreign languages, and as they can always be most successfully acquired in the countries where they are the native tongue, I consider that a sufficient reason for the advocacy of foreign study. Terms of residence in the music centres of Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, and the consequent familiarity with

* During the trial of the Horspool versus Cumming musical libel suit heard at the Royal Courts of Justice, London, in February, 1908, Dr. Milsom Rees, the famous throat specialist, whose patients include all the greatest contemporary singers of Europe and America, was called as a witness. In reply to a question from the examining counsel as to the unusual retention of an unimpaired singing voice by some of these artists, Dr. Rees said : " It is the result of elasticity in the ligamentous portion of their vocal cords. The most elastic vocal cord to-day is Madame Melba's. She makes use of the anterior portion of the cord, and that accounts for the lasting quality of her voice. She knowingly uses head notes instead of chest notes. It is an automatic process. A scale can be sung by putting the full tension on the reeds, or varying from the long reed to the short. . . . In the case of Madame Melba, there is no singer with more resonance and less nasal quality."

the work and traditions of the great masters of these countries, give the student a certainty, an authority, in her work which cannot be obtained in any other way. The subtleties and complexities of the art more easily possess the mind where music has long been fostered, and where it has become part of the national life, rather than the luxury, or perhaps affectation, of a class.

All these countries possess great teachers of singing, but I personally consider Madame Mathilde Marchesi, of Paris, the greatest of them all. I repeat my oft-expressed opinion that she is a marvel of scientific method, a most remarkable personality for whose place no city of the world has yet revealed a probable successor. Through the elder Garcia, who developed his method from the tenets of the earlier great Italian masters, Mathilde Marchesi conceived the spirit of her own principle of tuition, which may be roughly indicated in a few words: "Change to the middle notes on F. Begin the head notes on F sharp. Once on the head notes, always practise pianissimo."

Madame Lilli Lehmann I hold to be the greatest teacher of German vocal art. Every Italian city boasts of highly qualified masters, and if I were dealing with the possibilities of vocal tuition in London, I could name several most admirable teachers. In my own studies I have been most fortunate, for in the operatic rôles with which I am most closely identified I have had the invaluable assistance of the composers themselves—Gounod, Verdi, Delibes, Ambroise Thomas, Leoncavallo, Puccini, Massenet, Saint-Saëns. Holding, as I do, that the singer's mission is to interpret the message of the composer, and not to mutilate or embellish it

with extraneous ideas, I naturally consider the opportunity of securing the composer's assistance as a fortunate chance which cannot be too highly appreciated.

From the outset I advise young singers to look after the posing of the voice. They will know better than anybody where the break occurs, and they must see that the teacher does not adopt an extreme course in the endeavour to bridge it over prematurely. Any attempt at unduly precipitating the blending of the registers must result in injury to the voice—indeed, permanent injury is in this way often done during the initial stages of vocal study. Some enthusiasts have described my own voice as of one register.* I mention this to draw attention to the result that may be achieved by careful thought and industry, and as an incentive to the many students who discredit the possibility of hiding the natural break.

I am a great believer in the wisdom of fully recognizing every novice's individuality, but the general rule as to the register changes is a safe one for almost every student. There are exceptions, of course, and, as for myself, I carry my chest register up to F and change on F sharp, which is half a tone beyond the usual limit. When I went to Madame Marchesi, she at once recognized this natural peculiarity, and allowed for it in the scheme of my tuition, her discernment giving me a speedy chance to demonstrate that exceptional register changes do not constitute a bar to success. One point of guidance easy of remembrance is that any method that tires a student, that entails a sense of strain, is sure to be wrong.

* The late Sir Morell Mackenzie, the eminent throat specialist, thought that Melba used the same register throughout the voice.

The most valuable voices often present the most striking superficial difficulties, and only the most accomplished teachers should be entrusted with the task of their removal. It often happens that even where the voice is properly posed, there still remains a weakness where the registers change, and bad teachers frequently endeavour to produce an enlargement of tone by constant practice of this feeble section of the voice. I am strongly opposed to this policy, and I urge equal exercise of the whole organ as the best method of securing uniformity of tone. But if there should persistently remain a natural blemish, far better to retain the voice with its trifling inherent weakness, than chance its entire destruction through the enforcement of a tax which Nature indicates as oppressive. During the development of the average voice, scales, solfeggios, and vocalization over its entire range are absolutely essential to its proper growth; but once the period of vocal maturity is reached, I am sure all students who sing in public will be wise to reserve their voices as much as possible in private.

Young aspirants often write to me, and in commenting on the freshness of my voice and the spontaneity of my singing, assume that these conditions are the result of some occult knowledge entirely outside the possibility of their achievement. The secret lies in the fact that I never taxed my voice in the way peculiar to the great majority of inexperienced vocalists. My gospel has been to give the body ample exercise, and the voice ample rest. This, as I have indicated, is particularly necessary for the students who have already begun to sing in public.

Before even attempting to hum over any music, I am always careful to phrase it on the keyboard and commit it to memory. Young singers too often take a new song or rôle to the piano, and, without any knowledge of it, begin to use and waste the voice in a preliminary that could be equally well accomplished on a mechanical instrument. They chop and hack at their voices, not in any effort at vocal accomplishment, but merely for the purpose of memorizing. It is only when the words and music are firmly engraved on my mind that I use my voice on them, and even then I spare it as much as possible by practising the top notes quite pianissimo, except on the rare occasions at rehearsal where the full voice is needed. Practising high notes forte is one of the most pernicious customs of vocal study, and as a general rule it may be safely laid down that it invariably minimizes the possibility of those refined, soft effects which are not only a charm, but a necessity, to artistic singing. During practice students should always hold their forces well in reserve, and if they sing the upper register pianissimo in private, they will find that the forte effects will readily respond when public performances demand it. On the days when I sing in opera or concert I run through a few scales in full voice during the morning, and if I cannot sing top D perfectly I consider myself out of form.* Just before going on I try my voice again for a few seconds, to warm it.

Apart from the scientific necessity for proper economy of vocal means, I wish to point out that the general muscles of the body become slack in the case

* The range of Melba's voice is three octaves, terminating on the high F sharp.

of students who spend half the day or more sitting or standing by a piano, wearing out their vocal and physical resources in a mistaken endeavour at advancement. A beautiful voice, beautifully used, can only continue to come from a healthy body, and their cause would be far better served if they gave much of their wasted time to indulgence in open-air exercise.

An excess of diligence might easily become a hindrance rather than a help, and as robust health is an essential to any large measure of success, anything that impairs the physical vigour should be rigidly avoided. Happily, there is a great deal in a singer's life conducive to bodily strength, the most important being the strong and consistent use of the breathing apparatus, which in itself is almost sufficient to counteract such degenerating influences as late hours, night travelling, concentrated efforts, and the disappointments which, owing to the caprice of the public, the singer, the weather, or from other causes, must be reckoned with in every career. Many students, in their eagerness for musical headway, entirely neglect their physical welfare, and forget that plenty of fresh air, simple, nourishing food, and eight or nine hours' sleep are all necessary to the young singer, whose larynx invariably reflects her bodily condition. Common-sense regard for the individual requirements is almost the only dictum needed in this particular, and the student who has based her studies on physiological principles will have early learned the delicacy of her vocal organs and the course necessary for their protection. I personally greatly favour fruit and vegetables as an important item in the regular régime. For breakfast I take only toast

and tea ; at luncheon a cutlet, or a little chicken, with a light salad and fruit, but no rich dishes. My chief meal is dinner, which I have rather late—7.45 or 8 o'clock—and there is nothing to distinguish it from the same meal in the average household. When I am singing in the evening, I do not dine, but have a very light repast consisting of either fish, chicken, or sweetbread, with a baked apple and a glass of water at 5 o'clock, and I always find myself very hungry for supper when I get home from the opera or concert. On the evenings when I am not singing or entertaining, I am always in bed by half-past 10 o'clock, sometimes earlier.

My views on the value of individual training are well known, and carry with them a consequent opposition to class tuition. It is impossible for a singing student to give out her best as one of a group directed by a supervision which must in its very essence partake of the perfunctory. The singers who have succeeded after class training have been those whose personality and endowments have made them independent of circumstances. Reliance on choir or chorus singing as a helpful factor in the early period of vocal study I hold to be a most unwise course, as an unplaced voice may easily be permanently injured by its free employment in any such body. The following of any trade or profession during the early years of study is a very questionable economy, giving, as it does, to some extraneous interest the vitality which should be the treasure-house of the vocal organs.

Every grade of student may safely follow all phases of tuition where the voice is not called into use in the classes of the admirable colleges and conservatoires now existent in every large community. I think all

singers should make a thorough study of the piano, harmony, and counterpoint, which are as important in the expression of music as is grammar to the spoken or written language. The most serious study begins when the student comes before the public, a study which must be endless ; but if a young singer is not able to make a promising public début after eighteen months' legitimate work, then, in my opinion, she will never make any great success in her profession. Many British and American students are inclined to regard a fairly successful public appearance as an indication that future research is unnecessary, and so find themselves unable to escape from the chains of mediocrity.

The drama should be carefully cultivated by the vocal novice, and as a collateral aid, both to the science and art of singing, nothing counts for more than intimacy with the work of the great artists of the day. No opportunity should be missed of hearing and seeing famous singers and actors in their most important rôles. What an inspiration, too, comes to all who have a soul for music when they hear some famous conductor lead a fine body of musicians through a great masterpiece by Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Brahms, or Wagner ! No matter what branch of music a student may aim at mastering, every chance of hearing the best in opera, orchestra, recital, or oratorio should be eagerly seized on and seriously considered. Speaking for myself, I am always inspired and helped by every noble interpretation I hear, and into my own succeeding work I seem able to put something I had not so perfectly understood before.

The technique of singing is incalculably helped by

everything that improves the intellectual calibre, so the ambitious student should read not only all that is authoritative and informative on music, but become familiar with the beauties of general literature and art, and the wonders of natural science. The power of interpretation is immensely helped by a fine imagination, which comes easiest from a mind illuminated and beautified by wide culture. The singer who can appreciate great pictures, poetry, and statuary, who can reasonably apprehend the glories of the mountains, the forest, and the ocean, can more surely fathom the joys and sorrows of the human heart than the one who is merely well informed on affairs of music.

And now I feel myself drifting from the surer ground of science towards the indefinable sphere of art, the elusive qualities of which are beyond the pale of this article. I am convinced that the art of song lies outside the possibility of human generation, and that only those who are born to this subtle heritage can ever reach the topmost heights. It is impossible for any teacher to impart temperament or an unerring musical ear, but even these God-given gifts, and the minor endowments of mind and body, can be developed and enhanced to a remarkable degree by the intelligent and consistent application of those who seek to make themselves and others happier and better through the profession of music.

Neither do the entire powers of the artist come to anyone as a completed gift ; the ideal balance of the mental and physical faculties must be a matter of slow development fostered by manifold influences. This attainment should, therefore, be the aim of everyone who seriously enters on the study of singing, for in

its pursuit may be revealed, even where not suspected, that soulful spark which illumines with a mystic torch the work of the truly great. Perfection of technique is but the stepping-stone to the high plane of repose, where, after many vicissitudes, the student is transformed into the artist ; but then, in that day of self-determining realities, the artist must still remain the servant, as well as the master, of technique.

INDEX

A

Abbey, Henry, 98, 103, 275
Abercorn, Duke and Duchess of, 167, 209, 278
Adamowski, 113
Adams, Suzanne, 165
Adelaide, 182, 197, 291
"Aïda," 52, 71, 79, 109, 133, 139, 214, 312
Ainsley, Irène, 241, 242, 243
Aix, 71
Albani, 21, 112
Albany, Duchess of, 65
Alboni, 69, 72
Albury, 185, 186
Alexandra, H.M. Queen, 66, 139, 169, 170, 208, 210, 216, 217, 218, 219, 224, 228, 230, 231, 242, 276, 278, 294, 295, 309, 310
Alexis, Grand Duke, 61
Alvarez, Señor, 113, 129, 212
America, 59, 85, 86, 99, 103, 106, 108, 118, 121, 126, 142, 143, 202, 204, 221, 223, 254, 268, 275, 276, 280, 287, 297, 307, 314
Ancona, Signor, 88, 91, 112, 113
Andrade, 33
Antwerp, 101
Arbos, Señor, 132
Argyle, Duke of, 223
Arimondi, Signor, 112
Armstrong, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 142, 173, 247, 261, 282, 283
Arnoldson, 98
Astor, Waldorf, 166, 175, 225
Auckland, 202, 242
Austria, 153, 158, 163, 330
  Crown Princess Stéphanie and Princes of, 112, 168, 217
  Emperor of, 158, 159, 160

B

Bach, 22, 209, 337
Ballarat, 18
Balzac, 146
Baltimore, 105, 108, 144
Barbier, Jules, 241
Barton, Sir Edmund, 204
Bassi, Signor, 258, 260
Battenberg, Princess Henry of, 65, 223
Bauermeister, Mademoiselle, 70, 98, 112, 128, 165, 226, 227
Baughan, E. A., 223, 303
Baynton, Barbara, 301
Beaufort, Duke and Duchess of, 230, 231
Beaumont, Admiral and Lady, 247
Bedford, Governor and Lady, 280
Beethoven, 3, 138, 289, 337
Belfast, 167
Belgians, Queen of the, 29, 32, 39, 190
Bemberg, 69, 70, 71, 102, 106, 169, 236, 246, 293, 312
Bendigo, 18
Bennett, Joseph, 150
Bensaude, 144
Bergamo, 130, 131, 267
Beresford, Lord and Lady Charles, 234, 260

Bernhardt, Sarah, 50, 52, 53, 115, 165, 175, 176, 307
Berlin, 38, 45, 61, 153, 154, 155, 157, 261, 316
Berlioz, 168, 211, 312
Besson, Louis, 44
Bingham-Hall, Miss, 225
Bispham, David, 165
Bizet, 59, 125, 312
Blackburn, Vernon, 214
Blackpool, 228
"Bohême, La," 52, 139, 142, 144, 149, 163, 164, 165, 168, 169, 177, 210, 217, 219, 228, 229, 238, 239, 253, 259, 268, 269, 270, 272, 278, 295, 297, 312
Boito, Arrigo, 74, 215
Bonci, Alessandro, 129, 163, 209
Bonnard, 144
Boston, 96, 104, 105, 108, 115, 123, 133, 144, 211, 214, 260, 265
Bourguet, Emmanuel, 59
Bourke, Governor, 25
Braga, 68, 69, 73
Brahms, 337
Brassey, Lord and Lady, 152
Brema, Marie, 70, 82, 83
Brisbane, 13, 182, 183, 200
Bristol, 225, 230, 231
Brünnhilde, 124, 125, 312
Brussels, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 35, 38, 39, 44, 45, 47, 50, 63, 73, 190, 276
Buddee, 14
Buffalo, 104, 144, 260
Bunny, Rupert, 170
Burgstaller, 266
Butt, Clara, 174, 281

C

Cadogan, Earl and Countess, 162
Calvé, Emma, 59, 98, 111, 112, 113, 115, 209, 306
Cambridge, Duke of, 65
Campanini, Cleofonte, 258, 270, 274
Carbone, 98
"Carmen," 57, 59, 104, 112, 113, 115, 125, 139, 209, 312
Carnot, Madame, 63
Carrington, Lord and Lady, 16
Carreño, Madame, 159
Carus, Alfred, 292
Caruso, Enrico, 129, 168, 169, 240, 246, 278, 292, 308
Castellane, Countess Jean de, 120
Castilla, Ethel, 180, 181
Catholic Church, 17
Cecchi, Signor P., 13, 14, 15, 18, 19
Cellier, A., 22
Chamberlain, Joseph, 158
Chambers, Madame Lucy, 127
Chicago, 87, 93, 95, 105, 133, 144, 164, 271, 299
Christian, H.R.H. Princess, 175, 222
Christian, Madame, 5
"Cid, Le," 288, 312
Clarence, H.R.H. Duke of, 65
Cleveland, 259
Connaught, T.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of, 163, 215, 222, 278
Conservatoire, Melbourne, 198, 290
Paris, 52, 63
St. Petersburg, 60
Copenhagen, 84, 86
Coquelin, C., 100, 165, 176
Corrigan, Archbishop, 113, 114, 141, 304
Crawford, Marion, 116, 177
Crawshay, Mrs. Mary, 166

D

Dalmores, Charles, 217, 226
Damrosch, Walter, 132
Deakin, Right Hon. Alfred, 276
Delibes, Leo, 26, 31, 60, 154, 214, 312, 331
Denmark, 83, 86
Royal Family of, 49, 147, 277
Denver, 133, 144, 164
Desdemona, 72, 107, 112, 245, 312
Destinn, Emmy, 278, 310
Devonshire, Duke and Duchess of, 209
Devries, Fides, 43
Donalda, Pauline, 262, 307

Donizetti, 30, 130, 267, 272, 312
Donnay, Maurice, 292
Dow, 1
Dresden, 160
Dublin, 162
Dufferin, Marchioness of, 167
Dufriche, 88
Dumas, 30
Dupont, 27, 45
Duran, Carolus, 87

E

Eames, Emma, 98, 110
Edison, 1
Edward, H.M. King, 49, 55, 169, 174, 178, 179, 208, 210, 217, 219, 222, 223, 224, 225, 242, 248, 277, 278, 293, 294, 309, 310
"Elaine," 69, 70, 102, 106, 135, 169, 312
Elgar, Sir Edward, 178
Elizabeth, 90, 91, 92, 107, 312
Ellis, Charles, 132, 142
Ellsassar, 15
Elman, Mischa, 224
Elsa, 54, 71, 79, 84, 91, 101, 139, 312
Engel, 27, 39, 63
"Esmeralda," 56, 312
Eugénie, H.M. the Empress, 234
Express, Daily, 174

F

"Falstaff," 74, 76
"Faust," 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 60, 71, 83, 85, 87, 92, 115, 117, 123, 126, 129, 153, 168, 176, 178, 214, 229, 230, 231, 265, 266, 312
Favanti, Signora, 37
Fife, Duke and Duchess of, 49, 65, 121, 163, 169, 223
Findon, B. W., 296
Florence, 76
Fontenailles, Comte de, 47
Forfarshire, 1
France, 314, 320, 330
Frederick, H.M. the Empress, 54, 55
Fremantle, 280
Fremstad, Olive, 266
French, President of the, 208, 293

G

Galli-Marie, Madame, 59
Ganz, Wilhelm, 12, 22, 23
Garcia, Manuel, 233
Garner, Arthur, 15
Gazette, Pall Mall, 54, 57
Geneva, 169
Genoa, 76
German Emperor and Empress, 65, 155, 248, 261
Germany, 108, 139, 153, 156, 163, 314, 320, 330
Gevaërt, 30, 33
Gilda, 30, 34, 35, 48, 96, 303, 312
Gilibert, Charles, 210, 224, 258, 262
Gippsland, 6
Gladstone, W. E., 247
Globe, New York, 110
Gluck, 138
Goddard, Arabella, 11
Gounod, Charles, 26, 39, 41, 45, 50, 51, 52, 69, 86, 92, 94, 129, 209, 214, 231, 312, 331
Grainger, Percy, 172
Grau, Maurice, 85, 98, 126, 144, 165, 275
Greece, King, Queen, and Royal Family of, 49, 230
Grey, the Countess de, 66, 161, 176, 224
Guenett, 14
Gulbranson, Frau, 293

H

Hale, Philip, 144, 265
Halevy, Ludovic, 219, 292
Hambourg, Mark, 224
Hamilton, Marchioness of, and the Ladies, 167
Hamilton, 18
"Hamlet," 26, 32, 39, 41, 42, 57, 84, 87, 98, 111, 119, 214, 312
Hammerstein, Oscar, 252, 253, 255, 256, 257, 258, 260, 268, 270, 271, 274, 296, 308

Handel, 102, 154, 289
Harris, Sir Augustus, 33, 36, 37, 47, 55, 57, 121, 122, 161, 228, 234
Harrison, Percy, 231
Hastings, 6
Haydn, 289
Héglon, Madame, 212
"Hélène," 211, 212, 213, 217, 220, 287, 312
Henderson, W. J., 91
Herald, New York, 92, 93, 123, 124, 273
Hervieu, Paul, 292
Hesse, Grand Duke of, 49, 111, 112
Hichens, R. S., 147
Holland, 153, 163, 175
Hoose, Ellison Van, 144, 210
"Huguenots, Les," 106, 112, 115, 165, 312

I

Ireland, 167, 278
Irving, Sir Henry, 64
Isnardon, Jacques, 90
Italy, 73, 76, 77, 79, 82, 127, 156, 212, 231, 314, 316, 320, 330
Izouard, H., 44

J

Joachim, Dr. Joseph, 117, 127, 131, 140, 154, 156, 195, 226, 306
Joseph, Miss Alice, 57
Judic, Madame, 133
Juliet, 47, 48, 51, 53, 65, 72, 121, 148, 312

K

Kalisch, Alfred, 195
Kansas City, 144, 221
Kellermann, Madame and Miss, 14
Kerst, Léon, 44
Khayyám, Omar, 146
King's County, 13
Kitchener, Lord, 175
Koven, Reginald de, 106
Kowalski, Henry, 16
Krehbiel, Henry, 164
Kruse, Johann, 16
Kubelik, Jan, 166, 176, 209

L

Lahee, 99
"Lakmé," 31, 38, 107, 214, 312
Lapissida, 45
Lapommeraye, Henri de, 44
Lassalle, 41, 47, 54, 56, 98, 123, 266
Launay, George, 44
Lehmann, Lili, 252, 331
Leipzig, 153, 161
Leoncavallo, R., 80, 82, 83, 312, 331
Leschetizky, 159
Liége, 40
Lilydale, 6, 200, 201
Lind, Jenny, 84, 123, 138, 262, 226, 262, 329
Liverpool, 222
Loch, Sir Henry and Lady, 20
"Lohengrin," 54, 71, 82, 84, 85, 91, 97, 101, 107, 108, 139, 267, 312
London, 11, 18, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 46, 48, 53, 73, 74, 88, 101, 151, 152, 184, 207, 233, 235, 249, 253, 254, 256, 257, 271, 278, 279, 281, 283, 284, 287, 289, 291, 292, 295, 301, 316, 325
London, Jack, 146
Los Angeles, 144
Louis, St., 118, 133, 210
"Lucia," 24, 30, 33, 34, 35, 49, 63, 66, 69, 74, 77, 84, 86, 87, 88, 93, 97, 109, 121, 130, 131, 153, 155, 163, 166, 218, 259, 262, 272, 274, 287, 303, 312
Lucia, de, 98
Lumley, 37
Lunn, Kirkby, 217
Lussau, Zélie de, 59, 104
Lyons, 80
Lytton, Earl and Countess of, 60

M

Mackennal, Bertram, 152
Mackenzie, Sir Morell, 332

McKinley, President, 164
Madrid, 45
Maitland, J. A. Fuller, 173
Malaga, 232
Malibran, 44, 100
Manchester, Duchess of, 120, 169
Mancinelli, 47, 54, 103, 106, 112
Manners, Charles, 231
"Manon Lescaut," 80, 114, 117, 122, 153, 213, 229, 312
Marchesi, Mathilde, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 45, 50, 119, 242, 292, 293, 329, 331, 332
Marguerite, 50, 52, 101, 129, 168, 178, 237, 265, 312
Mario, 55, 147
Marlborough, Duchess of, 161, 209
Marseilles, 80
Mascagni, 83, 312
Mascheroni, 76
Mason, Mr. and Mrs. Kenyon, 113
Massenet, 113, 114, 115, 117, 122, 207, 213, 229, 312, 331
Maurel, Victor, 76, 77, 106, 107, 108
Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the Grand Duchess of, 121, 168
Melbourne, 2, 6, 9, 14, 18, 21, 25, 44, 46, 182, 185, 186, 187, 200, 202, 204, 281, 282, 283, 284, 286, 287, 288, 291
Mendelssohn, 55, 61
Mensdorff, Count Albert, 209
Mephistopheles, 92
"Messiah," 16
Meyer, General Lucas, 175
Meyerbeer, 112, 312
Micaela, 59, 102, 104, 112
"Mikado," 22
Milan, 38, 73, 74, 76, 79, 82, 100, 200, 253, 316
Minneapolis, 133, 134
Mitchell, 1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 13, 14, 16, 185, 201, 280, 281
Modjeska, 134
Monaco, Prince of, 66, 161, 169
Monte Carlo, 52, 73, 160, 168, 211, 212, 214, 220, 240, 287
Mozart, 138, 154, 226, 337
Muck, Dr. Carl and Mrs., 261
Musgrove, Mr. George, 15, 182, 189

N

Nagel, Regina, 162, 167, 176
Naples, 66, 291, 292
Nedda, 80, 82, 87
Nevill, Lord Richard, 188
Newcastle, 185
New Haven, 104
News, Daily, 227
New York, 37, 88, 92, 94, 97, 108, 109, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 123, 124, 133, 144, 164, 166, 210, 219, 222, 236, 247, 250, 251, 253, 255, 257, 259, 262, 270, 271, 274, 288, 294, 300
New Zealand, 205, 206, 216, 218, 241, 243
Nice, 66
Nicolini, 147
Nikisch, Arthur, 111, 306
Nilsson, Christine, 28, 43, 57, 84, 89, 93, 139
Nordica, Lilian, 98, 109, 113, 165, 306, 307, 321
Normanby, Marchioness of, 15
Norway, King and Queen of, 241, 245
Noseda, Aldo, 77

O

O'Connor, Hon. Daniel, 16, 263
Olitzka, Rose, 165
O'Mara, Joseph, 162
Opera-House, Manhattan, 250, 251, 252, 257, 258, 259, 262, 268, 269, 286, 289
Opera-House, Metropolitan, 219, 251, 252, 266, 268, 289
Ophélie, 32, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 57, 81, 312
"Otello," 72, 79, 107, 245, 312
Ottowa, 260
Otway, Colonel Jocelyn and Miss Ruby, 247

P

Paderewski, Ignace, 110, 116, 166, 195, 306
Padilla, Artot, 50
"Pagliacci," 80, 82, 87, 139, 312
Palermo, 68
Pandolfini, 144
Paris, 11, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36, 38, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50, 53, 59, 60, 62, 63, 66, 72, 73, 74, 88, 115, 117, 149, 157, 161, 169, 170, 181, 214, 217, 218, 236, 248, 274, 289, 292, 295, 316, 331
Parkina, Elizabeth, 217, 221, 307
Parry, Sir Hubert, 21
"Parsifal," 210, 266, 267, 293
Pasta, 100
Patti, Adelina, 26, 28, 39, 48, 74, 78, 88, 89, 93, 99, 107, 110, 123, 125, 131, 139, 147, 148, 223, 297, 306, 307
Paul, Grand Duchess, 61
Persia, Shah of, 49, 54, 294
Perth, 279
Petersburg, St., 38, 60, 62, 73, 74
Philadelphia, 96, 107, 133, 142, 144, 211, 271
Piatti, 131, 161
Pittsburg, 259, 260, 271
Plançon, Pol, 70, 83, 88, 91, 96, 103, 106, 112, 113, 128, 166, 176, 209, 306, 308
Plymouth, 246, 247
Portugal, King and Queen of, 219
"Preislied," 55
Presbyterian Church and Ladies' College, 5, 8, 10, 14, 192, 285, 290
"Prophète, Le," 55
Providence, 104
Puccini, 80, 142, 143, 144, 164, 212, 216, 268, 269, 310, 312, 331

R

Randegger, Alberto, 22, 49
"Rantzau, I," 74, 83, 312
Ravoglia, Giulia, 112
Rawson, Admiral Sir Henry, 202
Rees, Dr. Milsom, 237, 290, 330
Réjane, Madame, 133
Renand, Maurice, 39, 168, 169, 258, 260, 292
Reszke, Édouard and Jean de, 38, 47, 54, 55, 57, 58, 60, 65, 70, 83, 91, 92, 93, 94, 96, 97, 103, 104, 106, 109, 115, 123, 128, 132, 147, 163, 165, 195, 216, 246, 266, 306
Review, Saturday, 101
Rhodes, Right Hon. Cecil, 168, 175
Richard, Madame, 41
Richepin, Jean, 292
Richter, Dr., 278, 306
"Rigoletto," 27, 29, 33, 35, 47, 79, 96, 122, 126, 153, 169, 209, 214, 250, 259, 260, 292, 312
Ritchie, Charles, 243
Rochester, 144
Roger, Victor, 44
Rome, 69, 292
"Romeo and Juliet," 39, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 60, 65, 71, 83, 85, 87, 94, 96, 101, 103, 115, 123, 126, 128, 147, 163, 166, 209, 214, 216, 217, 312
Ronald, Landon, 209, 228, 229
Rosa, Carl, 22, 149
Rossini, 312
Rossmore, Lord and Lady, 167
Rothschild, Alfred de, and other Rothschilds, 137, 166, 175, 209, 292
Roumania, Crown Prince and Princess of, 111, 112
Roy, Charles le, 44
Roze, Marie, 122
Rubinstein, Anton, 60
Russia, 60, 61, 62, 63, 158, 221, 330
Royal Family of, 60, 61, 168

S

Sagan, Prince de, 120
Saint-Saëns, 211, 212, 213, 216, 287, 292, 312, 331
Saleza, 129, 163
Salignac, 165

Salt Lake City, 153, 222
Sanborn, John Pitts, junior, 250
San Francisco, 135, 144
Santos Dumont, 168
Sarasate, Pablo de, 232
Sardou, Victorien, 292
Sassoli, Ada, 175, 207, 210
Savage, Henry, 269, 321, 322
Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Duke of, 112, 163
Saxony, 163
King of, 160
Scalchi, Madame, 33, 94, 97, 98, 103, 106, 107
Scheff, Fritzie, 165
Scotland, 166
Scotti, Signor, 246, 308
Schumann-Heink, 165, 306, 308
Searelle, Luscombe, 127, 128
Seguin, 27
Seidl, Anton, 124, 130
"Siegfried," 124, 139, 267, 312
Sembrich, Marcella, 89, 307
"Semiramide," 87, 94, 97, 103, 107, 312
"Seville, Barber of," 133, 135, 137, 139, 163, 312
Shakespeare, 146
Sims, George R., 177
Soldene, Madame Emily, 245
Sorrento, 11
Soveral, Marquis de, 209
Spain, King and Royal Family of, 136, 224, 225, 232, 233, 248
Stockholm, 38, 83, 84, 85
Stradivarius, 117
Strakosch, Maurice, 26
Strong, Susan, 165
Stuart-Wortley, Rt. Hon. Colonel, 248
Sullivan, Sir Arthur, 22, 121
Sun, New York, 91, 106, 164, 266
Sutherland, Duke and Duchess of, 139, 166, 169, 176, 224, 310
Sweden, 83
King of, 85, 86
Switzerland, 169
Sydney, 16, 18, 182, 185, 202, 263, 286, 287, 288

T

Tamagno, 103, 107, 109, 112, 160
"Tannhäuser," 87, 90, 91, 95, 107, 108, 139, 267, 293, 312
Teck, Duchess and Princes of, 65, 209, 223, 230
Telegraph, Daily, 71, 82, 127, 137, 147, 216
Tennyson, Lord, 188, 192
Ternina, Milka, 137, 215, 306, 308
Thomas, Ambroise, 25, 26, 42, 115, 214, 312, 331
Thomas, Goring, 56, 312
Tietjens, 169
Times, The, 53, 71, 147, 210, 216, 236, 277
Toowoomba, 185
Tordeus, Mademoiselle, 31
Toronto, 260
Tosti, Paolo, 239, 246
"Traviata," 29, 30, 52, 54, 68, 123, 126, 133, 153, 158, 159, 160, 176, 223, 236, 256, 267, 277, 310, 312
Trentini, Signorina Emma, 229, 262, 307
Tribune, New York, 89, 91, 124, 125
"Tristan and Isolde," 217, 267
Turin, 76

V

Vancouver, 183, 191
Van Rooy, 266
Verdi, G., 27, 72, 76, 79, 154, 214, 312
Veron, Paul, 44
Victoria, H.M. Queen, 48, 54, 55, 65, 83, 128, 169, 170, 209, 234
Vienna, 38, 159, 160, 316
Vignas, 91, 95, 98
Violetta, 30, 123, 158, 236, 274, 310, 312
Vitu, Auguste, 41, 44

W

Wagner, 91, 108, 124, 139, 210, 261, 266, 267, 300, 312, 337

Wales, T.R.H. the Prince and Princess of, 49, 55, 56, 57, 65, 183, 163, 174, 175, 182, 183, 187, 190, 215, 216, 222, 223, 230, 241, 224
Washington, 104
Weber, Johannes, 44
Wiedermann, Elise, 23
Wilder, Victor, 44, 68
Williams, Mrs. Hwfa, 161, 260
Williamson, Mr. J. C., 15
Wilson, 175, 209, 224, 280
Winnipeg, 260

Y

Yale, 105
York, Duke and Duchess of, 147

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